University of Alberta

Revolution or Evolution? A Comparative Poetics of Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema

by

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To Kamran, Mahan, and Rodeen

Abstract

Revolution or Evolution? A Comparative Poetics of Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema is a study of Iranian cinema as a major cultural form of expression after the Islamic revolution in 1978. It argues that although other forms of cultural expression such as poetry and fiction were influenced by the social and political changes of the 1970s and 1980s, the main artistic metamorphosis occurred in the replacement of image for word. In other words, cinema took the place of poetry as the dominant cultural form of expression.

This analysis will depict how post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, as represented in Bahram Bayzai's and Abbas Kiarostami's films, has drawn on the extant themes in Persian literature, performing arts, and Iranian culture. The introduction provides an overview of the historical, institutional, and theoretical concepts that have influenced the post-revolutionary film industry. The first chapter explores the poetic roots of non-narrative cinema mastered in Kiarostami's filmmaking. It shows the way Hafez's poetry inspired the national nonlinear filmmaking. The next chapter studies the impact of the de-politicized approach in Sohrab Sepehri and Forough Farrokhzad's poetry on Iranian poetic films. Chapter three engages with the questions of modernity and identity as Bayzai has portrayed in his films. It investigates the concept of modernity in a non-Western context such as Iran. The last chapter considers the notion of cultural amnesia and Bayzai's recovering and re-historicizing the forgotten past.

After the Islamic revolution, Iranian cinema underwent *evolutionary* changes in its aesthetic pattern and sensibilities that brought originality and insight. The dissertation represents that Iranian poetic cinema is, to a great extent, an outgrowth of

Persian literary and philosophical discourses deeply embedded in Iranian culture. This project focuses on the way the emergence of cinema as the dominant form of cultural expression replaces the poetics of change and novelty for the long-established ideal of permanence and stability.

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A Note on Romanization

This dissertation utilizes the Library of Congress (LC) romanization system for Persian expressions and titles. Terms such as "Tehran" and "Iran", which are familiar to English speakers, are not Romanized according to the LC convention. Since in Persian *Hamzih* and *Ayn* are pronounced in the same way – both through a sudden opening of the larynx – both are represented as / ' / .

Introduction

The Islamic Revolution and the *Aesthetic* Evolution in Iran

In 1978 an Islamic revolution shook Iranian society to its foundations. In the post-revolutionary era, Iranian society has undergone a remarkable cultural evolution that is best represented in its cinematic productions. Thus, during and after the Islamic revolution, Iran not only experienced a tremendous change in the political and social arenas but also underwent a drastic metamorphosis in terms of its cultural and aesthetic discourses. My dissertation is a study of this cultural and aesthetic evolution that is, unlike the dominant forces of the Islamic revolution, secular (but not anti-religious) in nature. I shall draw on an aesthetic and poetic model to demonstrate how the poetic cinema that emerged in the pre-revolutionary period became the main artistic form of expression after the revolution. In my examination, I will explore how the post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, as represented in Bahram Bayzai's and Abbas Kiarostami's films, has drawn on extant themes in Persian literature and performing arts. This study thus sheds light on the connections between the dominant post-revolutionary cinema and Persian culture and literature. The Islamic revolution and its political and social consequences in the last twenty-eight years have impacted the Iranian cultural forms of expressions as a whole. Persian poetry, fiction, painting, and other artistic forms of expression were, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced by the social changes of the 1970s and the 1980s. My study, however, argues that the main artistic metamorphosis in the post-revolutionary cultural forms of expression occurred

in the replacement of image for word. In other words, cinema took the place of poetry as the central cultural form of expression.

In the introduction, I provide an overview of the historical and theoretical issues that have influenced the post-revolutionary films that are discussed in the dissertation. This in turn will clarify how the intellectual and historical circumstances gave rise to the emergence of cinema as the main form of cultural expression. In this major aesthetic change, the exalted poetic language of Persian poetry, the main artistic mode for centuries, was replaced by the image. Thus, this post-revolutionary transformation substituted cinema for poetry as the major national art. In its shifting from poetry to cinema as the dominant form, the Iranian post-revolutionary poetics became the successor of and at the same time a reaction to the poetics of pre-revolutionary culture. The methodological perspective that helped me construct my argument on how the later phenomenon emerged from its predecessor is the Russian formalist concept of the "dominant."

The term "dominant" was originally used by Juri Tynjanov (McHale 6), but this concept is best known to us through a lecture Roman Jakobson delivered in 1935. Jakobson was a linguist, literary scholar, and semiotician and founded the two theoretically seminal groups of the Moscow Circle and Prague Linguistic Circle. In his 1935 lecture, a brief but multifaceted talk that was entitled "The Dominant," Jakobson proposes that:

> The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure.

> The dominant specifies the work.... [T]he definition of an artistic work as compared to other sets of cultural values substantially changes, as soon as the concept of the dominant becomes our point of departure. (82-3)

The formalist notion of the dominant moves the emphasis from the poetic or artistic work *per se* to its relation to other poetic forms and its function within a network of interrelated artistic elements. This shift of stress links each "autonomous" poetic structure to other signifying structures on both synchronic and diachronic levels. The idea of the Jakobsonian dominant is not a static and unchanging concept. On the contrary, each cultural, literary, or aesthetic dominant may change through time, in turn leading to a poetic evolution. As Jakobson concludes:

> In the evolution of poetic form it is not so much a question of the disappearance of certain elements and the emergence of others as it is the question of shifts in the mutual relationship among the diverse components of the system, in other words, a question of the shifting dominants. Within a given complex of poetic norms ... elements which were originally secondary become essential and primary. On the other hand, the elements which were originally the dominant ones become subsidiary and optional. (85)

Therefore, the Jakobsonian dominant has provided a new method for evaluating the artistic phenomena. In any historical period, the shifting of the dominant could result in literary evolutions through which canons change and "subsidiary" cultural forms of expression become "essential" artistic works. This matter also recalls Tynjanov's

concept of "literary evolution" or "changeability" (Tynianov 67). In Tynjanov's perspective, certain prominent artistic elements could "automatize" over time to give rise to other poetic forms (69). In this process, the originally dominant constituent transform into a secondary element. "It does not disappear" Tynjanov confirms, "[i]ts function simply changes, and it becomes auxiliary" (69). Against this backdrop, I argue that Iranian culture has changed over time by looking back to its own past and examining other cultures and philosophies worldwide, to foreground elements once considered secondary or peripheral. In this process of the shifting of the dominants, poetry *did not vanish*, but lost its key role in Persian culture. Instead, the post-revolutionary poetics evolved into a visually oriented form of moving images, from a previously literary and written-based poetry.

In his article "After a Hundred Years" Bayzai argues that the unparalleled success of Iranian cinema in just a hundred years – as compared to other artistic forms, such as poetry, that originated at least two thousand years ago – demonstrates that the "image is now the language of people." He goes on to say that in Iran "the language of the image replaces the literary language. The image is the language of the people while the word is the language of the privileged" (363). Taking Bayzai's comment into consideration, we can assume that the popularity of the image among the masses is a major motive that mobilized the shift of dominant in the cultural scene. Iranian cinema is embedded in the national culture; thus it reflects Iranian history, culture, and identity, as well as its relations with other cultures, in a rather uncomplicated language that reaches average filmgoers. Moreover, Iranian spectators are informed by the aesthetics of Persian poetry. Iranian culture has very strong ties

with poetry. Poetry was not only the most popular aesthetic form but it functioned as the language of philosophical ideas and socio-political commentaries throughout ages. Iranian cinema employs this poetic-ness, deeply rooted in Iranian minds, in art films. This in turn created an aesthetic model in Iranian filmmaking in tune with the poetic aura of its culture. It should be noted that beyond the cultural motives that resulted in the popularity of Iranian films, there is an economic cause for the shift of the dominant in terms of the Iranian cultural forms of expression; cinema is the least expensive and most accessible form of entertainment – in general – and performing arts – in particular – for the masses compared to other types of performance such as theater (both the conventional dramas and modern theater). It is noteworthy, however, that the other type of mass media that is easily available to the Iranian spectators is television. But this medium has been state-funded and fully controlled by the Islamic government. In the post-revolutionary era, the number of films and TV serials dramatically decreased. Besides, most of the TV programs were heavily ideological-based and religious oriented shows with anti-royal, anti-Western, and pro-revolutionary sensibilities addressing and romanticizing either the revolution or the Iran-Iraq war. As a result, television in this epoch was not very successful in attracting a large number of spectators.

The central literary form before the Islamic revolution was poetry, especially in its modern form that is called *shi'r-i now* or the new poetry. The modern poetry refashioned the poetic themes and formal stylistics in the 1960s and offered a new poetic form that was socially and aesthetically concerned. In the second half of the 1960s and the 1970s, a new art cinema started taking shape in Iran, partly through

employing the themes that existed in Persian literature. This cinematic movement later became known as the Iranian new wave cinema. The artistic form and thematics of the new wave directors created an original body of art-house movies that were internationally acclaimed. This temporarily bright period of Iranian cinema, however, did not last for a long time. It was to be interrupted by the cultural and social upheavals of the revolution and, to a lesser degree, a devastating war with Iraq that lasted for eight years. The significance of the Persian modern poetry and the Iranian new wave and their connections with post-revolutionary cinema are explored in chapters one and two of the dissertation.

Nevertheless, in the pre-revolutionary period, the limited number of national art films could not compete with mainstream popular films and imported Western movies, especially the Hollywood productions that had monopolized the theaters. (Naficy, "Theorizing 'Third World Film'" 197). The Islamic revolution, according to the fundamentalist revolutionaries, was endorsed as a massive response to the economical and cultural interventions of the Western countries, especially the imperialist intrusion of the United States of America in the regional affairs. Cinema as a Western import and influence was regarded by the clerics as a corrupt medium whose aim was to spoil Iranians' ethics and their Islamic principles. In fact, since the first theater was established in Iran in the early 1900s, cinema did not acquire the clerics' approval. As Hamid Naficy indicates, "there is a report that in 1904 a major clerical figure, Shiykh Fazlollah Nuri, attended Iran's first public cinema in Tehran and proscribed it, causing it to shut down after only one month of operation" ("Islamizing Film Culture in Iran" 27). During the revolution, the destruction of

theaters became a symbolic act of protest against the Pahlavi regime and its Western supporters. Sadly, the revolutionary ritual of theater-destruction ruined "up to 180 cinemas nationwide" (Naficy, "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran" 30). One of the most overwhelming incidents in this regard was the explosion of Cinema Rex, a theater in the city of Abadan in the last months before the fall of the Shah (10 August 1978). In this tragic event, more than three hundred people who were trapped behind the locked doors were burned to death. Ironically, the film that was screened in Cinema Rex at that time was Mas'ud Kimiyaei's *Gavazn-hā* (*The Deer*, 1975) a film with clear anti-government sensibilities that had just got the permission to be displayed after being banned for three years. Although the public consensus blamed the government-affiliated forces for the incident at that time, the Shah denied the allegations. As Naficy has confirmed, "testimonies and documents complied after the fall of the Shah [...] established a clear link between the arsonists and anti-Shah clerical leaders" ("Islamizing Film Culture in Iran" 26).

Under those circumstances, Iranian cinema in both arenas of art-house and commercial films was in an inactive mode. The number of film productions, which was steadily increasing up to, for instance, ninety films in 1973 (Mehrabi 143), was significantly affected by the social turmoil caused by the revolution. In 1977, only thirty-eight films were produced (Mehrabi 175). The following year, the year of the revolution, the number of the films made dropped to eighteen (Mehrabi 177).

When the Islamic government took over, the clerics publicly denounced cinema along with other forms of "Western" entertainment like gambling, drinking, and dancing. Because of its massive influence in Iran, cinema was the target of the

revolutionaries' condemnation. As Naficy pinpoints, in the pre-revolutionary works of Ayatollah Khomeini (*Kashf ol-Asrar* and *Velayat-e Faghih*) that were widely read and quoted by the time of the revolution, cinema was regarded as "the direct cause of prostitution, corruption and political dependence" ("Islamizing Film Culture in Iran" 28). Khomeini detested cinema as an undignified form of mass media. Paradoxically, it should be noted that the social realist and revolutionary films such as *Safar'i Sang* (*The Journey of Stone*, 1978), *Dāyirih-i Mīna* (1978), *Guzarish* (*Report*, 1977), and *Marsīyih* (*Lamentation*, 1978) had a great influence in agitating the public emotions in the last year of the rein of the Pahlavis.[1] In a similar fashion, the supporting role of other forms of mass media positively impacted the end result for the anti-Shah groups. For instance, both the Iranian National Television and BBC Persian Radio[2] sympathized with the revolutionaries and consequently stirred up the Iranians' views against the Shah and his local and international allies. Although Khomeini widely criticized the "ill effects" of cinema, he did not shy away from admitting that cinema and media in general could be exploited to promote Islamic values. In the historical speech that he delivered right after his return to Iran in January 1978, a few days before the victory of the Islamic republic, he softened his views in terms of cinema and other forms of mass media:

> We are not opposed to cinema, to radio or to television ... The cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake of educating the people, but as you know, it was used instead to corrupt our youth. It is the misuse of cinema that we are opposed to, a misuse caused by the

> treacherous policies of our rulers. (qtd. in Naficy, "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran" 29)

Thus the Islamic government, under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, employed cinema as an ideological and propagandist tool. The exploitation of cinema was to advocate the particular Islamic culture that they adopted and encourages. After the Islamic revolution, during the transitional period, that is, between the years 1978-1982, the uncertain political and economic situations, as well as the government's lack of interest in cinema discouraged local cinematic productions. But the exhibition of old movies, by censoring the "un-Islamic and anti-Islamic" parts of the films, and importing foreign movies re-invited the Iranian spectators to the cinema. Many of the foreign films that filled the market in those years had socialist and revolutionary thematics that were in tune with the revolutionary atmosphere of the society. Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* is an example of one of the most beloved films among the spectators in the post-revolutionary years in Iran. This film was simultaneously screened in 12 theaters in Tehran and 10 in the provinces (Naficy, "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran" 33).

After a period of revolutionary turmoil that resulted in literally destroying movie houses and a transitional period of uncertainty, we witness the emergence of Islamist filmmakers, such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Moreover, in the early 1980s, the Islamic government created institutions that reorganized the film industry in accordance with the state's anti-Western and pro-Islamic policies. These institutions, including the Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF), the Foundation for the Oppressed (*Bunyād'i Mustaz'afān*), and the Arts Center of the Islamic Propaganda Organization

(*Huzih Hunarī Tablīghāt'i Islāmī*), created a cinema based on morality and religion. Between 1982 and 1989, committed filmmakers made films like *Tubih Nasūh* (*Nasūh's Repentance*, 1983) and *Bāykut* (*Boycott*, 1985) by observing the Islamic codes of behavior to advocate the moral and religious values of the newly-founded government.

During the Iran-Iraq war, a number of government-funded films were made about the war and its social and cultural consequences. The Arts Center of the Islamic Propaganda Organization and the War Affairs Department in the National Television (IRIB) were two of the main producers of war films.[3] In these films, the "holy cause for the war" with Saddam Hossein, that is, "the sacred defense," was dramatized and glorified. Most of these films were made by the government to normalize the state of war and to produce and advocate, what they called "the culture of sacred defense" among the Iranian youth. The main emphasis on the war-related films was the action on the front line. But the portrayal of the war and its heroes, in many films including *Du Chashm'i Bī-Sū* (*Two Blind Eyes*, 1983), was one-dimensional and simplistic. In order to encourage local filmmakers, the government established a special film festival (The Holy Defense Festival or *Jashnvārih'i Difā'i Muqadas*) for the films that explored the Iran-Iraq war as their main theme. What the Islamic state was seeking through sponsoring film productions and organizing TV programs about war and revolution was to manipulate the image of revolution and war. At this stage, the government became engaged in monopolizing power, erasing opposition groups – such as the Tūdih party, Mujāhidīn'i Khalq, and Fadā'īān – that participated in the overthrow of the Shah, and controlling the social and cultural spheres. This control

was done by way of conducting restricted measures of behavior and enforcing a coherent Islamic culture that intended to obliterate social, cultural, and ethnic differences. At this time, the number of the supporters of the Islamic state was decreasing considerably. The Islamic state, by the end of 1980s, lost its charismatic legitimacy. As a reaction, the government determined to strengthen its control on the cultural products (Ghazian 83) to "produce" a desirable image of the Islamic state and its committed young hero. As Hossein Ghazian stated, almost no foreign films were screened in theaters at this time. Furthermore, the local productions were extensively filtered and censored (84).

The war with Iraq lasted eight years. Many of the Islamist young people, like Mohsen Makhmalbaf, who had contributed to the revolution and the war were disappointed by the social consequences of these events (Makhmalbaf in an interview with Dabashi, qtd in *Close Up* 186). A number of directors who were formerly involved in creating the image of the Islamic Iran as the embodiment of an Islamic utopia started to criticize both the revolution and the war. Films such as Makhmalbaf's *Arūsī'i Khūbān* (*Marriage of the Blessed*, 1988) and Ebrahim Hatami-kia's *Az Karkhih tā Rhein* (*From Karkheh to Rhein*, 1993) deal with committed young soldiers who feel betrayed and disillusioned by the outcome of the war. In these films, the notions of martyrdom and the sacredness of the war – which were central to the early films about the war – are not accentuated. Furthermore, the main emphasis of these films shifted from the action in the warfront to the social impact of the war on urban and rural places in the whole country. The films that were made in this era presented a

more sophisticated image of the cultural and psychological impacts of the war on Iranians.

By the late 1980s, Iranian cinema restored its position as an artistic form of cultural expression. Many new wave directors, like Daryush Mehrjuei and Abbas Kiarostami started making films once again. Filmmakers such as Bahram Bayzai and Kiarostami employed the formal and thematic elements of Persian literature and the conventions of performing arts in creating an Iranian art cinema. The increasing number of production companies and institutions that supported artistic productions had a positive impact on reestablishing the Iranian art cinema. For instance, a special production company (Sima Film) in IRIB started producing both popular and art films. A number of filmmakers like Abolfazl Jalili began making films under the auspices of Sima Film (Devictor 68). Another institution, *Sīnimā'i Tajrubī* (Experimental Cinema) was founded in the same year as FCF (1983) to encourage and support the young filmmakers in their first cinematic experiences (Devictor 68). Moreover, in the private sector, the number of production companies grew, in the 1990s, to 60 companies (Devictor 68). In this period, more experienced institutions, for instance, the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (*Kānūn-e Parvarish'i Fikrī'i Kūdakān va Nujavānān*), as well as new foundations like FCF and the Arts Center for Islamic Propaganda sponsored and produced art films. Although it should be mentioned that the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults or *Kānūn* (which was active before the revolution) had a significant role in the production of pre-revolutionary art films. Many of the directors who started their careers in *Kānūn* (such as Bayzai and Kiarostami) became the main

auteur filmmakers in the post-revolutionary era. This thesis is an examination of two new wave directors (Kiarostami and Bayzai) whose post-revolutionary films contributed the most to the change of the cultural dominant. In both directors' careers, the supportive role of *Kānūn* had a significant part. Therefore, I will discuss the special status of *Kānūn* on Iranian art cinema in the first chapter of this dissertation.

In any event, the institutional organization of the private production companies and the government created a relatively suitable condition for the Iranian art cinema to flourish. Having said that, we should not underestimate the impact of the international (mainly European) market that was ready to invest on the production and distribution of (certain genres of) Iranian cinema. Despite the fact that the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) did not change its censoring measures in the 1990s,[4] the Iranian art cinema substituted for the ideological cinema that the state failed to maintain.

The emergence of the Iranian art cinema in the late 1980s refashioned the film industry in Iran. Its original cinematic aesthetics were widely perceived in Iran and – because of, for one reason, exhibition strategies of production and distributing companies such as FCF – among the international spectators.[5] This new artistic form had an essentially humanistic approach and eluded the (political) religiosity promoted by the government. Besides, it showed a significant diversity that was at odds with the state-sponsored films, which advocated a fixed, unified, and homogeneous culture based on a certain ideology. In a remarkable move, the post-revolutionary cinema ponders the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Iranian nation. For instance, in *Bāshū: Gharībi'i Kūchak* (*Bashu: The Little Stranger*, 1986), Bayzai portrays figures who

come together from diverse areas such as northern and southern Iran. The war-struck southern child (Bashu) who sought refuge in a northern farm speaks Arabic while the female farmer and her children speak in Gilaki. As Nasrin Rahimieh observes, in his juxtaposition of linguistic and ethnic differences, Bayzai problematizes "the myth of a linguistically, racially, and culturally unified Iran" (239). Rahimieh concludes that the "Iran posited in *Bashu, The Little Stranger* is anything but uniform. It is a country incapable of facing its fear of the other within" (251). The depiction of cultural and social heterogeneity as well as the renegotiation of gender and power is not exclusively seen in Bayzai's films. On the other hand, these issues are highlighted in films such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Gabbih* (1997), Kiarostami's *Ta'm'i Gīlās* (*Taste of Cherry*, 1997), and Tahmineh Milani's *Du Zan* (*Two Women*, 1998). The aesthetic approach the Iranian filmmakers adopted furthered this heterogeneity. For example, shooting films on location with non-professional actors represented life in its real condition with complex and multifaceted questions.

The representation of diversity distinguishes the post-revolutionary art cinema from both the early productions of the committed young revolutionaries and most of the pre-revolutionary cinematic productions. This crucial feature of the Iranian art cinema – which caught the national and international attention – proved that the art-house cinematic works were not ready to sustain the state's monological imaginings. What happened in the post-revolutionary Iranian art cinema recalls Susan Hayward's definition of the concept of "cinema":

> [C]inema is not a pure product. It is inherently a hybrid of many cultures, be they economic, discursive, ethnic, sexed and more. It exists as a cultural

> miscegenation, a deeply uncertain product, therefore, as to its heritage – *patrimoine*, as the French put it, makes the point more clearly. Who and where is the father? While it may matter to hegemony, it does not to cinema in and of itself. For it is a production whose reproducers are wide and scattered and not one – not a single maternal body, nor a lone paternal one. Nor is it solely the offspring of maternal and paternal discourses. Its moreness, its hybridity challenges the deadliness of paternal … binary thought. (101)

If we accept Hayward's implication as a universal definition of cinema, we would come to realize why the Iranian government failed to produce a state-produced "cinema" and culture as its vision was a hegemonic and homogeneous one of a totalitarian power.

It is true that Iran certainly followed a path that has led to more state-sponsored cinemas compared to many other national cinemas (for instance many Western cinemas). Factors such as partial nationalization of production and exhibition and the imposing of governmental censorship were encouraging directors to make films in line with the state's Islamic sensibilities. The question that rises here is why the state cinema failed in Iran? In other words, the question is why Iranian cinema did not become a totalitarian-style state cinema, such as the former Soviet cinema that – while it produced a number of modernist masterpieces – predominantly produced mediocre semi-propaganda films (Mast and Kawin 171, 195). I would argue that Iranian cinema in the post-revolutionary era has been growing in a particular context that led to producing many state-ish films but ultimately managed to produce more apolitical art

films than propagandist ones. Before the revolution, Iran was developing a tradition of art film production. Despite the fact that many artists and writers chose to live in exile after the victory of the Islamists, most of the new wave directors stayed home. It was almost impossible, on the part of the government, to ignore this artistic force that was determined to stay and continue its intellectual activities. Many of the films that these directors made in the first few years after the revolution were being banned. Bayzai's *Chirīki'i Tārā* (*The Ballad of Tara* 1978) and *Marg'i Yazd-gird* (*The Death of Yazd gerd* 1983) are only two examples of the films that were proscribed by the government. But in any event, these directors, who were now joined by a younger generation of filmmakers, did not give up making films. Instead, they tried to make films with allegorical sensibilities to evade the censorship.

Besides, national exhibiting institutes such as FCF realized that these art films could be used in the international market as profitable sources of revenue. Their attempts in finding a global market for the art films were also in tune with the government's policy that was trying to soften the image of the Islamic state. The government considered many of the art productions, which were targeted to the international festivals and commercial arenas, as politically neutral films. This assumption was partly due to the fact that most of the post-revolutionary art films do not – directly – criticize social problems. Many of these films, romantically, chose rural landscapes as their setting. Therefore, the urban problems such as the government's struggling with the hejab (female covering) issue and the influence of Western culture were not represented in these films. Iranian art cinema managed to survive and developed as a major artistic form. Through the emergence of art cinema

after the revolution, Iranian cinema, after a short break, resumed its natural growth towards a heterogeneous cinema. Thus the advent of art cinema in its refashioned form was not only a crucial artistic moment but also it marked a culturally significant movement. It was a cultural development that detached the state's ambitions in producing a state-culture from a national art that, in many instances, depicts both national and transnational/universal matters.

The cinematic heterogeneity that was mediated in the realm of art cinema after the Islamic revolution reached out to Iranian audiences. In the post-revolutionary era, cinema became the most popular form of entertainment and a major site of social and artistic commentary. As a result, it changed the main cultural form of expression to a visual-oriented medium that is able to imagine an alternative national domain. The cinematic discourse whose main focus was humanist issues and the representation of the very essence of life had nothing in common with an "art" from that is meant for propagating politics. At this point, the state and cinema, as a form of national art, started going their separate ways. Thus the Iranian poetic cinema, as an aesthetic form of expression, created an autonomous artistic domain. This artistic domain is not connected to the current political domain, which still tends to preserve a monological approach towards culture and society. If we consider the political domain as the actual/material or the outer sphere of influence, this alternative artistic domain functions as the imaginative and imagistic inner sphere. Interestingly, the condition of the dominant artistic form in Iran as an inner dominion and its relation to the outer reality is reminiscent of the traditional Persian residential architecture that consisted of two separate quarters of *bīrūnī* (the external) and *andarūnī* (the internal). The inside,

or *andarūni*, is the most private, intimate area of any architectural space. It is the place where family members are most relaxed and able to behave in the most unguarded manner. *Andarūni* was the domestic space reserved for the insiders. The external, or *bīrūnī*, is by contrast a public space. The *bīrūnī* quarter was designed for social interactions – of mostly the man of the house. Formal visitors and those individuals who were not welcomed to the family quarter, which is the *andarūni*, were entertained in this external part of the house. The *bīrūnī* normally had a reception hall and it was decorated and structured specifically for guests and visitors. A courtyard usually separated these two quarters. The concepts of *bīrūnī* and *andarūni* that are central motifs in Iranian architecture are also socially and culturally relevant themes in a mixed society whose very existence is based on the notion of otherness. The *bīrūnī* life is the social life of the individuals where people should observe social codes of manners. By contrast, the *andarūni* life is the spiritual life that could be imaginative, liberating, and entertaining. While the social and political realities of Iranian society after the upheavals of the revolution and a bloody war left little for its citizens to dream about, the Iranian spectators found a refuge in the images on the screen. It should be noted, however, that it was not the image *per se* that brought the spiritual liberation for the spectators. It was the power of image in activating imagination and dreaming that created a cozy *andarūni* inner zone that liberated the spectator to visualize and imagine in a different way.

Cinema provided an inner space of representation for the local and diaspora spectators. It is a free zone of representation or spectacle because is based on imagination and art. This cinematic space chose not to follow the politicization that

was encouraged by the government and the government's dissidents inside and outside the country. Iranian art cinema, as an inner space of representation, implies a fragmented perception. The artistic and apolitical inner zone of culture, in its Iranian context, functions as a fragmentary influence that resists a shallow homogenization of the nation. It mobilized the production of a spatially differentiated otherness within the Iranian social sphere. The interplay of imagination and perception in the art cinema revealed these *andarūni* and *bīrūnī* cultural spaces that brought cultural fragmentation, difference and otherness. The concerns of those who transfigured the inner zone of culture (that is, the directors of Iranian art cinema) were essentially elitist. Their imaginings of national art were essentially different from the fundamentalist aspirations that defined the outer zone of Iranian culture.

This post-revolutionary art cinema is the subject of my thesis. My study represents the way the extant themes in Persian poetry and the visual arts were employed in Iranian films to present a cinema that is in dialogue with modernity on the cultural, social and artistic levels. In the four chapters of this dissertation, the discussions will take into account both the thematic and formal lines of the films. Depending on the relevance of the formal or thematic aspect, the emphasis will switch from one to the other. In order to illustrate my argument on the poetics of Iranian post-revolutionary cinema, I will focus on the cinematic works of two prominent directors, Kiarostami and Bayzai, whose post-revolutionary profiles have contributed to the shaping of Iranian art cinema.

Abbas Kiarostami is probably the best-known Iranian director in the international scene; directors as distinguished as Jean-Luc Godard and Akira

Kurosawa have praised his films. Kiarostami was born in 1940 in Tehran and studied painting at the University of Tehran. During the 1960s, he was working as a graphic designer and illustrator. The innovative credit title of Mas'ud Kimiyaei's *Qeysar* (1969), which was made by Kiarostami, caught the attention of the critics at that time. In the same year, he helped to set up the filmmaking division of *Kānūn* where he made his first film entitled *Nān va Kūchih* (*Bread and Alley*, 1970). This film was a neo-realist narrative and became nationally and internationally (not widely, though) acclaimed. Since then, he has made more than 20 films, including feature films, documentaries, and educational shorts. His films are seemingly simple on the plot level and philosophically thought provoking on the level of thematics. He has also written screenplays for other directors, such as Jafar Panāhi and Bahman Qubādi. In the late 80s, Western festivals started showing his films. The first film that was widely acclaimed was *Khānih'i Dūst Kujāst?* (*Where Is the Friend's House?*, 1987). He is the first Iranian director to win the Palme d'Or for his *Taste of Cherry* in 1997.

Bahram Bayzai's films are among the most popular art films in Iran, despite their highly metaphorical language, which makes them difficult to comprehend. Bayzai was born in 1938 in Tehran. He was a professor at the University of Tehran until the Islamic revolution interrupted his career. Bayzai is a scholar of the performing arts, playwright, and filmmaker. He has undeniably refashioned the Iranian visual arts and re-mythologized the culture. Bayzai's interpretation of myth is a "modern" response to the question of self and identity. He has founded a cinematic tradition that clrealy expresses his cultural and historical concerns by employing the conventions of visual arts. Bayzai rediscovered *ta'zieh* (Iranian passion plays) as the

most important form of traditional Iranian visual arts to convey contemporary issues of the Iranian society. The screenplays that he prepares for his films and other directors are written in a highly polished language. His films are dramatic and theatrical.

The first chapter examines the aesthetics of Kiarostami and its relation to classical Persian poetry. The second chapter deals with the way Kiarostami draws on modern Persian poetry. Chapter three investigates Bayzai's cinematic sensibilities and their connection to the questions of Iranian identity and modernity. In chapter four, I will depict how Bayzai's filmmaking is inspired by the conventions of Iranian performing arts and the reconstructing of these conventions to highlight the significance of the past in the individuals' modern selves and identities. The first and fourth chapters take on the connection of the past with the post-revolutionary cinema. Chapter two and three, on the other hand, deal with Iranian modernity and modern Persian arts and how these concepts become relevant to the Iranian cinema after the revolution. The first chapter of this dissertation explores the relations between classical Persian poetry, especially *ghazal* poetry, and the cinematic sensibilities of Kiarostami in his post-revolutionary films. The chapter briefly explores the Iranian new wave and commercial cinemas. This overview provides the cultural backdrop against which Kiarostami's aesthetics began to flourish. Then I examine the nonlinear structure of Kiarostami's films, which creates a poetic and non-narrative cinema. This non-linearity, as I will argue, is inherited from the fragmented structure of Hafez's *ghazals*. Similar to the form of *ghazal*, in each film by Kiarostami, there seems to be no semantic unity. The semantic unity in the *ghazal* resides in each couplet, while in

the films I discuss the meaning is encompassed within the image. Kiarostami's emphasis on landscape and nature, as well as his long takes and minimal editing implement a filmmaking style that is image-oriented and fragmented on the narrative level. This particular aesthetic approach to filmmaking in Iran is called *Sīnimā'i Taghazzuli* (which could be roughly translated as "lyrical cinema"). It has established a non-narrative cinema that is spatial. Chapter one does not merely investigate the connections of Kiarostami's filmmaking with the poetic form of *ghazal* from a formal point of view. On the contrary, it illuminates the thematic relations between the films and *ghazal*. Themes such as the notion of *pīr* or leader, portrayal of ruins, and the concept of *rindī* or hedonism, which are central to Hafez's poetry and Sufism are discussed in terms of Kiarostami's stylistics. The next part of the chapter mainly concentrates on the director's *auteur*-based approach in creating a poetic cinema that is based on ambiguity and ellipsis. This approach, as I will explain, has a distancing effect on the spectator. The last part of chapter one explores the Islamic interpretation of the story of creation, which is an important Sufist theme, and its resonance on Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*.

The second chapter further examines the relations between Persian poetry and Iranian cinema. It illuminates the way Kiarostami's aesthetics has drawn on the new Persian poetry as represented in the poetry of Sohrab Sepehri and Forough Farrokhzad. Both of these poets de-conventionalized Persian poetry by their fresh look at existence in general. Sepehri and Farrokhzad succeeded to present an art form that was, against the political atmosphere of the Iranian intellectual circles, intimate, personal, and down to earth. Kiarostami, who adopted these poets' stylistics,

aestheticized and visualized the seemingly simplest events of everyday life. I discuss how the employing of children as well as the use of certain cinematic techniques such as depth of field enhance Kiarostami's poeticization of everyday living. This chapter also explores Farrokhzad's film *Khānih Siyāh Ast* (*The House Is Black* 1973) and its impact on the Iranian art cinema as represented in Kiarostami's films. I will show that as *The House Is Black* highlights the joys of life over its sufferings caused by disasters, Kiarostami takes on the immediate happy moments of one's life even in the midst of a catastrophic situation. The ironic gaze of the director endorses this approach. Besides, it encourages the spectator not to get absorbed in the filmic events. By contrast, this approach makes the spectator conscious that she or he is merely "viewing" a film and not reality. In my examination in terms of irony, I will discuss films such as *Mashq'i Shab* (*Homework*, 1990) and *Bād Mā rā bā Khud Khāhad Burd* (*The Wind Will Carry Us*, 1999) to show the way the ironical and self-critical gaze of the director softens harsh realities. The next part of chapter two explores how Kiarostami was inspired by the poetry of Sepehri and Farrokhzad in his poetic treatment of *mise-en-scène*. The aestheticizing of human isolation in both modern Persian poetry and Kiarostami's films is the last topic of chapter two. This chapter will depict Kiarostami's philosophical approach towards life. Kiarostami as a director employs his camera to "write" the poem of life in the same way a poet such as Sepehri writes about life.

Chapter three engages with the questions of modernity and identity as Bayzai has portrayed in his films. I will define the concept of modernity in a non-Western context such as Iran. This notion and its demonstration in Bayzai's films in the form

of centering the subject will be explored. My definition of modernity in a non-Western framework suggests that modernity should not be treated as an unchanging and fixed concept. Moreover, my examination of modernity in Iran, on cinematic, social and cultural levels, clarifies that modernity is not an exclusively Western notion. On the contrary, I argue that in each society modernity may have unique features. Against this backdrop, I discuss modernity in Iran as it is represented through cinema. In Bayzai's films, individuals are not doomed to dissolve in the society to function as social signifiers. In contrast, these individuals, as portrayed in Bayzai's dramatic and elaborate psychological films, challenge destiny and social forces. I discuss that the figures in these films show a dynamic reconciliation of their social traditions with modernity. My discussion in chapter three demonstrates that Bayzai's centering of the subject is achieved by employing stage aesthetics. Then I will move to examine the topic of the deterritorialized Iranian subject in Bayzai's films. In this section, I will discuss the confluence of modernity, history and traditions in films such as *Musāfirān* (*Travelers*, 1992). This confluence creates an uprooted and multi-layered subjectivity represented in the characters' personality.

The last chapter of my dissertation investigates the cultural amnesia and Bayzai's recovering and historicizing the forgotten past. Here I examine how the director problematizes the official and hegemonic historical accounts that are institutionalized in the collective memory. I will present the way Bayzai substitutes seemingly insignificant personal and domestic objects for "historically" important documents in his search for the past and modern identity. In the films that I will explore in this chapter, the domestic and informal spaces are informative and

enlightening. In contrast, the formal space is ambiguous and deceiving. Bayzai's films are alternative historical accounts that reveal the neglected subjects of Iranian historiographical accounts. Gender representation is one of the main concerns of this director as Bayzai re-imagines men and women in his theatrical films. His portrayal of women and men, as opposed to most of the historiographical accounts and the national cinematic representation, does not erase the multi-layered personality of characters. By de-conventionalizing gender roles, Bayzai re-mythologizes Iranian women. I will also examine the conventions of Iranian performing arts such as *ta'zieh* in Bayzai's aesthetics, to depict his artistic consolidation of modern issues with traditions. The last section of chapter four deals with the notions of real and imagined spaces. It explores the juxtaposition of the actual and imaginative spaces in Bayzai's films. This brings a dialogical aura to his films that have broadened the imagistic possibilities of Iranian cinema and make us, as spectators, imagine and visualize a better future.

My dissertation is an attempt to represent the poetics of the dominant cultural form of expression in the post-revolutionary Iranian culture. This dominant visual culture put an end to "a time-honored aesthetics of permanence, based on a belief in an unchanging and transcendent ideal of beauty" in Daryush Ashuri's words. The main artistic form of expression in Iran has shifted to embrace "an aesthetics of transitoriness and immanence, whose central values are change and novelty" (Ashuri, *Modernity and Us* 1).

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[1] As I remember, in the last few months before the collapse of the Pahlavi regime, the Shah promised more public and intellectual freedom to regain the support of the Iranians. As a result, the journalistic and literary publications, along with film productions, enjoyed a temporary liberation and ease. A

number of films that were banned in the preceding years were screened and widely seen by the audiences.

[2] At the time of revolution, BBC Persian Radio was called "the voice of revolution" in Iran.

[3] The War Affairs Department was also producing a series of documentaries and TV serials that were shown in the different channels of National TV. One of the most manipulative and propagandist documentary series, which employed a poetic cinematic form to praise the Iranian fighters, was called *Ravayat-e Fath* (*The Narrative of Victory*) directed by Morteza Avini. During the production of the last episode, Avini was killed in a land mine.

[4] Except for a short time in early 1980s that MCIG, under Mohammad Khatami's supervision, loosened its grip on Iranian films.

[5] Iranian art cinema has been widely acknowledged by international audiences (Tapper 1-26). The international spectatorship of this cinema is a subject that should be addressed in detail. My dissertation is focused on the relations between Iranian art cinema and Persian cultural paradigms. Thus, this thesis does not extensively tackle the question of the (international) spectatorship.

Chapter One

Abbas Kiarostami and the Aesthetics of *Ghazal*

Introduction: Formation of Iranian Cinema, Marriage of the Old to the New

The relations between cinema and literature in Iran originated when Iranian narrative cinema began in the 1930s. Ever since Iranian directors such as Abdolhosein Sepanta and Ardeshir Irani made the country's first fiction films, familiar themes of classical poetry, in particular, and literature, in general, have been tailored to the new artistic medium.[1] For instance, in Iran's first sound film, *Dukhtar'i Lur* (*The Lor Girl*, 1933), Irani employed the familiar codes of the love story in Persian poems such as the narrative romances of *Shāhnāmih*. In 1934, Sepanta made *Firdowsī*, an aesthetic narrative about the life and times of the national poet, Ferdowsi. In terms of spectatorship, bringing Persian literary themes into the Iranian cinematic space was an intelligent practice. Sepanta's employment of Persian classical poetic themes, for example, made his films appealing to Iranian audiences and even to his Indian viewers, who were informed by Persian literature.[2] Therefore, Sepanta continued to exploit ornate literary discourses in films like *Shīrīn and Farhād* (1934), and *Laylī and Majnūn* (1937), which were cinematic adaptations of the twelfth century Nezami-Ganjavi's famous *manzumehs* or verse-stories of the same titles. The popularity of these stories among spectators promised lucrative returns. Furthermore, making the connection between the old exalted Persian literature and the new medium elevated cinema to a high-status artistic mode of expression.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Iranian cinema strengthened its relation with literature. The outcome was a new movement in the film industry that would come to be known as new wave cinema. When the national cinema emerged as an established art form, the linkage between cinema and literature became a fundamental trait informing Iranian art cinema. Coincidently, it was in these years that both poetry – in its new form called modern poetry – and cinema were flourishing in Iran. In this period, when Persian poetry was in its prime, the Iranian film industry began its journey toward maturity.

In the 1920s, a young poet and writer, Ali Esfandyari, who chose Nima Yushij as his *nom de plume* and became popular among his Iranian readers as Nima, transformed the conventions of Persian poetry. His poetic style was innovative in both form and content. Nima's poetry was an innovative attempt to dismantle the "time-honored but paralyzing rules of rhyme, rhythm and the other percepts of poesy" (Karimi-Hakkak, *An Anthology* 7). In Nima's poems, classical thematics, such as repeated images of a universal 'beloved' and strict adherence to the old meters and rhymes, are gone, but replaced by a novel language with realist and modern social themes. When he published his second volume of poetry, *Afsānih* (*The Legend*), Nima introduced new possibilities to Persian poetic discourses. The innovative language and romantic images of the poem reflected the aspirations of modern man. It portrayed a socio-politically conscious poetic self who is thoroughly in tune with nature but disgusted with the chaotic state of urban life and its societal affairs. The publication of *Afsānih* was a revolutionary incident in the realm of Persian poetry, but its impact

went far beyond the realm of literature. In any event, *Afsānih* opened up pristine venues in other forms of artistic expression in Iran.

For almost five hundred years (from the 15th century to the 19th century) Persian poetry had been delimited by conventions, precepts and rules that gradually brought this prodigious poetic tradition to near stagnation. As Karimi-Hakkak indicates, "[w]hereas Persian poets of Medieval Persia such as Ferdowsi, Khayyam, Sa'di, Rumi, and Hafez had penetrated new spheres with the thrust of their imagination, their descendants, during the general cultural decline that followed, sought merely to imitate them" (*Anthology* 2). In terms of its linguistic form, the obsolete and artificial language of so-called classical poetry was an imitation of the Persian used in medieval times and had few affinities with modern Persian. As a result, this poetic language was difficult to comprehend by ordinary people. It was against this backdrop that Nima's resilient and groundbreaking voice emerged to bring about a new era in Persian poetry.

The poetic discourse that Nima invented in the 1920s – what became known as *shi'r'i now* or new poetry – was followed by other poets such as Ahmad Shamlu, Nader Naderpour, and Mehdi Akhavan-Sales in the early 1950s. "These pioneers of contemporary Persian poetry," says Amin Banani, "have succeeded in freeing themselves from the confines of predetermined rhyme schemes and traditional 'poetic' language" (in Kesseler and Banani 8). The new canon appeared to portray the realities of the feverish society through a powerful and innovative language. In this way, Persian poetry began its golden period in the modern era. Poetry was always considered the most exalted art form in Iran. At that time in particular, new poetry

regained its status as the "dominant" form of artistic expression. In the 1960s, when the new wave directors turned their gaze on social issues by employing the conventions of Persian literature and visual arts, the new poetry was already in its full bloom. The "children" of Nima were now the major voices in all artistic venues, in tune with the cultural modernity that was gradually shaping the formation of modern Iranian subjectivity. Their poetic tradition affected Iranian cinema in the same decade and the decades to come. Later, these literary and poetic sensibilities of the new wave directors were reinforced in post-revolutionary films. This chapter explores the connections of Iranian post-revolutionary cinema with the sensibilities of classical poetry. In my examination, films made by Abbas Kiarostami are the main focus of attention. While chapter one represents the relations of cinema with *ghazal* – a poetic genre in classical Persian poetry – the following chapter examines the impact of the new poetry on Kiarostami's filmmaking.

During the 1960s there were crucial changes in both fiction and documentary films made by Iranian filmmakers and cultural activists inspired by literature and dramatic arts. The impact of literature on cinema in this epoch was mostly through a few poets and writers such as Forough Farrokhzad and Ebrahim Golestan who were also engaged in filmmaking. Their involvement in cinema stimulated the marriage of literature and cinema, the two main forms of cultural expression. As discussed in chapter two, Farrokhzad's film, *Khānih Siyāh Ast* (*The House Is Black*, 1962) marked a new era in Iranian cinema by employing her poetic vision in making a "poetic documentary" about leprosy. Equally important was Farrokh Ghafari's *Shab'i Ghūzī (The Night of the Hunchback*, 1964), a modern adaptation of a *Thousand and One*

Nights. In *The Night of the Hunchback*, Ghafari – who had already made a few documentaries and a banned feature entitled *Junūb'i Shahr* (*Down Town*, 1958) – "freed the feature film from the dominance of machismo values of the melodramatic *Kulāh Makhmalī* genre" (Reza Sohrabi qtd in Mehrabi 109). However, according to many critics including Hamid Dabashi, modern Iranian art cinema begins with *Gāv* (*The Cow* 1969), the product of a close collaboration between playwright Gholamhosein Sa'edi and the prominent director Daryush Mehrjuei. The emphasis of film critics on the importance of this film represents *The Cow*'s greater impact on both the national and international cultural scenes at the time. Dabashi asserts that "Mehrjuei achieved for Iranian cinema what no one before him had been able to do: give it character and direction, articulate its potential, and bring it to global attention" (*Close Up* 43). In the following years, Iranian cinema, enriched by the input of directors like Mehrjuei, Farrokhzad and Ghafari, secured its position as the dominant artistic form of expression in post-revolutionary Iran. The rise of directors such as Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf, among other directors, further transformed Iranian cinema in this period.

Modernity and change were partly experienced through the poetic transformations that occurred during the constitutional revolution[3] and in the rise of new poetry in Iran. In the Iranian cultural sphere, the next chapter was the marriage of poetry with cinema through which the concepts of modernity and change were to become more localized and integrated into popular culture. This newly-incorporated art of poetic cinema inherited realism, symbolism, and radical humanism from one of the greatest modern film waves. Although one could see the influence of Italian neo-

realism and French poetic realist stylistics on the filmmaking of Iranian directors, this cinema was distinctively Iranian with its unique literary background. By the mid-1970s Iranian cinema, enriched by films such as *The House is Black, The Cow, Ragbār* (*Thunder Shower*, 1971), *Shāzdih Ihtijāb* (*Prince Ehtejab*, 1974), and *The Deer*, was already demonstrating the constructive impact of literary discourses on cinema.

The Iranian filmmakers who tailored Persian literature with the national cinema were internationally acclaimed and established a cinema that would be recognized in the years to come as a new art form alongside poetry, theater and novel. However, they failed to reach a mass audience. After the Islamic revolution in 1979, young and committed Islamist filmmakers tried to establish an Islamicized cinema to promote revolutionary ideologies while enjoying governmental support through institutions such as the Mostaz'afan Foundation and the Ministry of Jehad of Reconstruction. Art cinema during the years between 1978 to mid 1980s was in a dormant mode. By the mid 80s, however, Iranian art cinema was revived once again. Experienced filmmakers including Kiarostami, along with newcomers like Rakhshan Bani Etemad, integrated the conventions of the pre-revolutionary new wave stylistics with new sensibilities. The revived Iranian cinema was inspired by Persian literature and transformed Iranian cinema into a global artistic mode.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the impact of Iranian cinema on the collective culture grew significantly, recalling the popularity of new poetry of the 1950s to 1970s. However, as Dabashi has indicated, two factors made Iranian cinema "far more important in the range and endurance of its effects. First, its reception by millions of

Iranians inside and outside the country (an audience that modernist poetry could never boast), and, second, its crucial celebration by a global audience (an achievement inherently barred to Persian poetry because of the language barrier)" (*Close Up* 4).

The Role of *Kānūn* in Kiarostami's Filmmaking in the *Filmfarsi* Era

While Mehrjuei and a few other art filmmakers were enjoying the global celebration of their movies in the 1960s, Kiarostami was initiating a new dialogue between the deep-seated traditions of Persian poetry and the new promising art of cinema. Unlike Mehrjuei or Farmanara, who engaged with drama and the novel as the main frames of reference in making their films, Kiarostami employed poetry in his cinematic productions.

"The essence of Persian culture," says Reza Baraheni, "could be found in its poetry" (236). Poetry was not merely the most important art form in Iran: poetry was and still is deeply rooted in the Iranian mind, to the point where Iranians – even many illiterate people – know the poetry of Hafez, Khayyam, and Rumi by heart and practically apply these poems, in the form of expressions, in everyday language usage. Iranian culture and the Persian language are enriched by a literature that existed for thousands of years, alive with metaphors, allegories, and symbols. Moreover, the post-Islamic Iranian philosophy was primarily associated with the philosophical scheme of Sufism that is charged with the abstract and metaphoric language of Persian poetry. In fact, one of the most significant venues of Islamic mysticism in Iran was poetry. The strong relation between Sufism and poetry is well represented in the works of classical poets such as Farid o-din Attar, Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, and Shams-o din Mohammad Hafez.

This chapter sheds light on the way Kiarostami's cinematic sensibilities would set the aesthetics of classical Persian poetry into a cinematic language that was to be ripened in his cinema. As stated before, cinema from the very beginning was in a constant dialogue with literature in Iran. In other words, Kiarostami was not the first filmmaker/auteur who drew on literature in making films. What distinguishes Kiarostami's work, in terms of its relation to Persian literature, is the fact that his cinematic stylistics made profound formal and philosophical connections with Persian poetry. This connection is not based, for instance, on adapting a much-loved literary classic or paying homage to a great masterpiece. On the contrary, Kiarostami's stylistics is a mediating practice, that is, it translates from one medium to another, through a liberating act of thematic and formal recovery. His cinema is an aesthetic practice on its own right, but is influenced by Persian poetry that was the dominant literary form in the Iranian cultural landscape during the 60s and 70s. The national – and to some extent international – shift of attention towards Iranian cinema in the post-revolutionary period proved to be a paradigm shift from a culture based on poetry to a predominantly visual culture with poetic sensibilities.

A crucial formative factor in Kiarostami's intellectual career was the establishment of the film division in the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (what is known in Iran as *Kānūn'i Parvarish'i Fikrī Kūdakān va Nujavānān*). This film division was founded in 1969 under the supervision of Kiarostami and Firuz Shirvanlu. The Institute or *Kānūn* was a government-sponsored organization set up by Leili Jahanara, a close friend of Farah Diba, former queen of Iran. The founding of *Kānūn*, as was announced at its

inauguration, was part of Pahlavi's general policy to "inform Iranian children and youth with the current cultural and artistic phenomena of human civilizations" (Omid 1027). From a different perspective, however, the establishment of *Kānūn* was to engage both intellectuals and youth in politically harmless activities (Mehrabi 353). *Kānūn* was committed to high-quality artistic productions and recruited prominent writers, poets and filmmakers – taking into consideration that the most renowned artists of the time had leftist ideas. Therefore, the institution became a haven for Iranian intellectuals ranging from Ahmad Shamlu and Samad Behrangi, who wrote children's stories and songs, to Bayzai and Kiarostami, who made films for children.

The film division of *Kānūn* had a tremendous impact on the shaping of Iranian alternative cinema as a completely separate genre from the mainstream *filmfarsi,*[4] or the commercial low-quality film productions of Iranian cinema. The significance of *Kānūn* in determining the future not only of Kiarostami's career but also of Iranian art cinema as a whole would become illuminated if filmmaking in pre-revolutionary Iran were closely examined in its socio-cultural and economical contexts. During the three decades before the Iranian revolution in 1978, primarily because of box-office pressures, high-quality but unprofitable films such as *The Cow*, and Farrokh Gaffari's *Downtown* were rare exceptions among the large number of *filmfarsi* movies produced each year.

The mainstream cinema in Iran at that time was following either Samuel Khachekiyan's thriller film sensibilities or the noble-poor-boy's-success-story formula represented in *Ganj'i Qārūn* (*Qārūn's Treasure*, 1965). This latter formula became astonishingly successful at the box office until the Islamic revolution shook Iranian

culture to its foundation. The thriller films were made by producers such as Mehdi Misaghieh in Misaghieh Studios and Joseph Va'ezian in Azhir film studios, both of whom employed Khachekian as one of their main directors. Khachekiyan's *Faryād'i Nīmih Shab* (*Midnight Scream*, 1961) and *Yik Qadam ta Marg* (*One Step to Death*, 1961) provided Iranian directors with a lucrative formula in making commercial films (Mehrabi 97). The innovative editing, camera movements and use of German Expressionist sensibilities in their *mise-en-scène* with high-contrast lighting were the formal means to Khachekiyan's success. The mingling of suspense with a melodramatic story and exploiting popular actors such as Mohammad-Ali Fardin (in *Midnight Scream*) further secured the publicity of these films. After the screening of these two films, making thriller movies became a common trend in Iran. As Mas'ud Mehrabi indicates, twenty-seven films were made in the country in 1962, half of them suspense and thriller films (100). *Dilhurih* (*Anxiety*, 1962) and *Sudā-garān'i Marg* (*The Traders of Death*, 1962) are two examples of thrillers that received rather favorable critical reviews (Mehrabi 101). Although thriller films were quite popular in the early 60s, Khachekiyan's sensibilities were translated into B-movie productions with recurring zoom shots, exaggerated lightings, and irritating music selections (Mehrabi 101).

The years 1964 and 1965 are decisive in the history of Iranian commercial cinema. With *Āqā'i Qarn'i Bīstūm* (*Mr. Twentieth Century*, 1964) and *Qārūn's Treasure*, Siyamak Yasami made the most profitable films in Iranian cinema until then. It is noteworthy that in the same years, two films were also made in the alternative realm. Gaffari's *The Night of the Hunchback* and Ebrahim Golestan's first

fiction film, *Khisht va Ayinih* (*Brick and Mirror*, 1965), brought national and global acclaim but did not thrive at the box-office. In contrast, Yasami's cinematic formula, what would later be known as *filmfarsi*, secured a lucrative method of filmmaking. In fact, this new genre was so successful that thriller movies were soon part of the history of the nation's commercial film industry. In the *filmfarsi* genre, the misery and poverty of the masses were abandoned in favor of a portrayal of Iran's dream life. This narrative approach was combined with action scenes and Persian dance sequences, usually in a café or bar, to make the films more attractive to the spectator. Moreover, the *filmfarsi* directors exploited (by then) charismatic lead actors and actresses such as Fardin and Forouzan or Googoosh and Sa'eed Kangarani – who played romantic couples in many films in the 60s and early 70s – to promote their films. Therefore, *filmfarsi* satisfied the audiences' demand for escapist and light entertaining movies. This new genre attracted more spectators to the theaters. As a result, the number of film productions rose from around forty movies per year to eighty films in 1966 (Mehrabi 111).

The making of escapist films in the pre-revolutionary years was not exclusive to popular film directors like Yasami who were known for their popular *Ābgūshti* films.[5] The box-office pressure led directors such as Mas'ud Kimiyaei – who proved his cinematic skills in *Qeysar* (1969) – to entertain viewers with *filmfarsi* sensibilities in films like *Reza Muturī* (*Reza, the Cyclist*, 1970) and *Balūch* (1972). At the same time, producers and filmmakers who refused to consider the market imperatives were undergoing financial crises. For instance, after Bayzai's *Thunder Shower* failed at the box-office in 1971, its producer, Barbad Taheri, was jailed when he was unable to

repay his debt (Omid 612). Alternatively, filmmakers including Gaffari and Golestan who were involved in making art-house films were supported by certain institutions. Gaffari was encouraged to make art films and was sponsored by the ministry of Art and Culture under the direction of Mehrdad Pahlbod, the shah's brother-in-law. Golestan, a former reporter and *cinéma vérité* filmmaker for NBC and CBS in Iran (Golestan in Jahed 119), found his resources under the auspices of the ministry of Petroleum in oil-rich Abadan to make documentary films in the 1950s. Golestan's expensive documentaries turned out to be prize-winning poetic interpretations of life and industry in southern Iran.[6] Later on, Golestan founded his own studios in Darrous, Tehran. He employed experienced technical staff like Mahmoud Hangval and Soleiman Minasiyan and renowned poets and writers such as Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, Forough Farrokhzad, Najaf Darya-Bandari, and Karim Emami to make a number of outstanding films during the 60s. Other art filmmakers had to convince a producer to invest in their productions.

It is against this backdrop that the film division in *Kānūn* created new venues for art filmmakers who were unable to find financial resources. *Kānūn* film productions had intellectual objectives and, paradoxically, many of them were not comprehensible by younger audiences or even the average adult filmgoer. Nevertheless, the films that were made in this center depicted artistic representations of Iranian life through fiction movies, documentaries, and animations. While a number of *Kānūn*'s productions, such as the animation film *Āqā'i Hayūlā* (*Mr. Monster*, 1970) by Farshid Mesqali, could be interpreted as politically charged films, Kiarostami's films had universal humanist concerns. Kiarostami, whose projects were

financially secure, was not forced to meet commercial demands in his filmmaking. In the absence of box-office pressures, he focused his artistic gaze on representing a poetic approach to life through his re-reading of reality, which was to portray the world as a far more meaningful place for the spectators. His source of inspiration in making films was mainly the rich legacy of Persian classical and modern poetry.

Discovering *Bread and Alley*

As Peter Wollen states, "Cinema is not simply a new art; it is also an art which combines and incorporates others, which operates on different sensory bands, different channels, using different codes and modes of expression" (8). In the case of Iranian art cinema, the combination and incorporation of poetry with cinema is one of the most fruitful dynamics, represented not only in Kiarostami's films but also in the works of filmmakers such as Bahman Qobadi and Ja'far Panahi who followed Kiarostami's school of filmmaking. The principles of this union were conceived in pre-revolutionary short films made by Kiarostami in *Kānūn*, which defined his stylistics in the films made during the 1990s.

In fact, the shaping of his poetic approach was already evident in his first film, *Bread and Alley*. The film's plot is very simple. A boy who has just bought a fresh loaf of bread is heading home when a stray dog approaches him. He gets frightened and tries to follow a grown-up who leads him in unfamiliar directions. Then he comes up with another solution, giving the dog a piece of bread and going home. When he gets home, the boy's sister does not let the dog in and in the last sequence we see the dog in the street – probably waiting for another passerby. In this film, according to Jonathan Rosenbaum: "the uncredited musical accompaniment – a cheerful jazz

version of 'Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da,' a tune on the Beatles White Album ... – sets the [happy] mood precisely" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 8). In his first filmmaking experience, Kiarostami is faced with the challenge of working with the most difficult type of actors, children and animals, but the end result is a poetic short film with an "almost unnoticeable" "moral" lesson (Dabashi, *Close Up* 46). His attention to form is evident in this short movie. The camera work and editing are smooth and the performance is impressive. *Bread and Alley* was recognized as a significant film as soon as it was screened. As Jamal Omid indicates, *Kānūn* screened three animations and four shorts, including *Bread and Alley*, in a number of international film festivals that year. Among all these films, Kiarostami's film was the most celebrated one in these festivals (Omid 1028). *Bread and Alley,* with its humanistic approach to life, projected the world of children in a way adults could not capture. This film marked the onset of a new film aesthetics that was to produce the best of Iranian cinema.

Kiarostami continued to make shorts for *Kānūn*, by using children and youth in films like *Musāfir* (*The Traveler*, 1972), *Zang'i Tafrīh* (*Recess*, 1973), and *Du Rāh'i Hal Barāy'i Yik Mas'alih* (*Two Solutions for One Problem*, 1975). In *Guzārish* (*Report*, 1977), however, Kiarostami is more engaged with the current social and political issues of his country. At the same time, *Report* is a film with autobiographical elements. Although the director's presence is evident in his later works,, none of his films are as autobiographical as *Report*. These are the issues he did not peruse in the post-revolutionary films that alternatively engaged in the universal aspects of life. In his interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum, Kiarostami talks about this change in his filmmaking aesthetics:

> If you're interested in what happened between *Report* and my more recent films, for me it's that I changed my mind about life. I am not inside my home as much as before; I don't have the same problems; I worked with children, so I am much closer to children now, and I am much closer to nature and landscapes. I wasn't a photographer then, but I am a photographer now. (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 54)

Depicting the children's world that is alien to adults' eyes, as well as nature and landscape, become key constituents of his later films. In films such as *Bi Tartīb yā Bidūū Tartīb* (*Orderly or Unorderly*, 1981) and *Avalī-hā* (*First Graders*, 1984), Kiarostami visualizes a profound and poetic reading of life in a minimalist fashion.

While the whole country was undergoing a revolution that would change the social and political equilibrium of the Middle East, and to some extent the world, Kiarostami revolutionized Iranian and world cinema through his global concerns in his post-revolutionary filmmaking. He abandoned his local and self-centered interests in favor of broader perspectives that redefined the notion of filmmaking. What makes his filmmaking style controversial is partly his specific concern for the formal structure of his films that resemble poetry.

This study explores Kiarostami's post-revolutionary films through an emphasis on their textual meanings. As Wollen puts it, "any criticism necessarily depends upon knowing what the text means, being able to read it. Unless we understand the code or the mode of expression which permits meaning to exist in the cinema, we are condemned to massive imprecision and nebulosity in film criticism, an unfolded reliance on intuition and momentary impressions" (16-17). Seventy years ago the

Russian Formalist critics insisted on studying not only literature but also the "literariness" of different cultural expressions. This still holds well. My close reading of Kiarostami's films and their relations to Persian classical poetry represents the "literariness" or "poeticity" of a cinema that shows resemblance to the classical poetic sub-genre of *ghazal*. The strong relations between film and poetry in its Iranian context show the distinctive features of Iranian culture that both unify and verify different cultural modes.

Cinema as *Ghazal* or *Sīnimā'i Taghazzuli*

Among other forms of classical Persian poetry, Kiarostami's filmmaking is closer to *ghazal*, a sub-genre of Persian lyrical poetry, as represented in Hafez's poems. These similarities with Hafez's poetry are found at both the philosophical and poetic levels of Kiarostami's filmmaking. By employing Hafez's "spatial" poetic universe, Kiarostami achieves a non-narrative cinematic form that has captured audiences at an international level. Through examining Kiarostami's films from a formal perspective, I will shed light on the contextual significations that are aroused by poetic form. André Bazin better articulates the importance of form in understanding the content of films. In his collection of articles entitled *What Is Cinema?* Bazin states:

> Our intention is certainly not to preach the glory of form over content. Art for art's sake is just as heretical in cinema as elsewhere, probably more so. On the other hand, a new subject matter demands new form, and as good a way as any towards understanding what a film is trying to say to us is to know how it is saying it. (30)

Before engaging with the main discussion, I dedicate an introductory subsection to Hafez, his philosophical milieu, and *ghazal* as a poetic form that he employed to articulate his philosophy. Afterward, my study explores the relations of Hafez's lyrical poetry with a special form of poetic cinema commonly known in Iran as *Sīnimā'i Taghazzulī* – which roughly translates as "lyrical cinema" as represented in Kiarostami's aesthetics.

Khājih Shams'i dīn Muhammad Hafez Shirazi, the medieval poet and philosopher, was and still is the most influential poet in the Persian-speaking world. Hafez of Shiraz, as he is called, was born in 1325/26 or 727/28 After Hijrah (A.H.) in Shiraz, in the Fars province of south-central Iran. He memorized the *Qur'an* by listening to his father's recitations of it (the name Hafez means the one who has memorized the *Qur'an*). He also memorized many of the works of his hero Sa'di (d. 1292), as well as Attar (d. 1220), Rumi (d. 1273) and Nezami (d. 1209). In his early twenties, Hafez was patronized by Abu Eshaq-e Inju (1341-53 A.H.), who held undisputed control of Fars. At this time, Shiraz was enjoying relative prosperity after a period of anarchy and serious economic hardship under the Mongol rulers. When he was thirty-three, the Muzafarīs (Amir Mubariz o-dīn Muhammad Muzafar) invaded his home town and he later had to flee Shiraz and reside in Esfehan when he fell out of favor with Shah Shujā' Muzafarī. At the age of fifty-two, by invitation of Shah Shuja', he ended his exile and returned to Shiraz. He was re-instated to his post between 1358-68 at the college where he taught theology and wrote commentaries on religious classics. In the late 1380s, Shah Mansūr'i Muzaffarī became Hafez's patron. A lifelong resident of the city of wine, roses and nightingales, he gained much fame and

influence in Shiraz. When he died at the age of sixty-nine, he had some 500 *ghazals*, 42 *rubaiyees*, and a few *qasidehs*, composed over a period of 50 years. Hafez only composed when he was divinely inspired; therefore, he averaged only about 10 *ghazals* per year. His focus was on writing poetry worthy of the Beloved.[7]

During his lifetime, Hafez was famous beyond Shiraz – eastward to India and westward to other portions of Islamic dominion. In the last three centuries, when the East and the West began to influence each other, Hafez became a world poet, read in many Eastern and Western languages. For instance, Goethe composed his *West-östlicher Divan* in emulation of *Dīvān of Hafez*. According to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Hafez ranks with Shakespeare. John Payne, who translated him into English verse, ranked Hafez with Shakespeare and Dante (Yohannan 436). Not all readers may agree with these two literary comparisons; nonetheless, Hafez is distinguished as the sultan of *ghazal* and *Lesan-al Gheib* (Tongue of the Hidden) – or the Sufi poet who reveals the hidden truth – in a nation that is well known for its poetry. The poetry of Hafez of Shiraz and his poetic mysticism have had a tremendous impact on Persian culture and literature ever since. In Wheeler Thackston's words:

> [i]f Sa'di's *Golestan* has been read by more people, and Mawlavi's *Mathnavi* has been called the *Koran* in Persian, no book has been so reverenced, no poet so celebrated, and no verse so cherished as Hafez's *ghazals*... Hafez sang a rare blend of human and mystic love so balanced, proportioned and contrived with artful ease that it is impossible to separate the one from the other; and rhetorical artifice is so delicately woven into the fabric of wisdom and mysticism that it imparts the vivacity and

> freshness to ideas that, in and of themselves, may not have been new or original with Hafez. (64)

There are few poets like Hafez whose magical words are still living in the Iranian mind. The secret of his eternal appeal may be the fact that among all other Iranian mystical poets of the classical epoch there were few who, like Hafez, crossed religious mysticism (*Irfan'i Zāhidānih*) to embrace a more playful, courageous, and questioning version of mysticism called poetic mysticism (*Irfān'i Rindānih*), which originated in the school of Khorasan Sufism. In this school of thought (perfectly represented in *Kashf ul-Asrār* by Meibodi and *Mirsad-o Ibād* by Najm-o dīn Rāzi), poets and thinkers evaded rational thought and logic in favor of bringing forth a non-rational and poetic interpretation of the story of Genesis in particular and life in general (Ashuri, *Mysticism* 79).

It is true that there were other poets who versified the same concepts Hafez culminated in his poetry, but the magic of Hafez's poetic style is missing in their poetry. Hafez was not the founder of the poetic genre of *ghazal* or the philosophical background of the specific Sufism he endorsed in his poetry. Contrariwise, the themes Hafez employed in his lyrical poetry already existed in both Persian poetic and philosophical traditions. For instance, similar themes are found in the poetry of Sa'di whose *ghazals* influenced Hafez to a great extent. His mystical interpretation of life and religion was, as Daryush Ashuri has asserted in *Mysticism and Rindi in Poetry of Hafez*, borrowed from two mystical works of *Mirsad al-Ibad* and *Kashf ul-Asrār*, which were in turn mystical interpretations of the *Qur'an* (80). In the formation of the particular *ghazal* that he wrote, Hafez conveys meaning through an exalted lyrical

form that was innovative in its ambiguous and imaginary language as well as its linguistic diversions. Hafez's poetry is mostly famous for its sublime use of lyrical language. In other words, it is the magic of words, or what modern linguists would call 'stylistic elements' that make the reading of his poetry a unique experience for the Iranian reader. Therefore, it is partly the formal aspect of Hafez's poetry that made his *Dīvān* the most celebrated literary text in Iran. This aspect of Hafez's poetry changed *ghazal* in both structural and contextual elements. After investigating the formal and contextual aspects of *ghazal*, I examine how the same passion for form has made Kiarostami's filmmaking into a unique cinema.

Despite other Persian poetic genres both in the same mode of lyrical poetry (such as *qasīdih*)[8] and narrative poetry (such as *mathnavī*,[9] *hīmāsih*,[10] and *manzūmih*[11]) Hafez's *ghazals* are non-narrative and non-linear (Baraheni, vol. I 543-45). This fact, however, does not hold true in terms of *ghazal* as a lyrical mode. Generally speaking, *ghazal* is a monorhyme poem whose subject is love. It has 7 to 15 lines in which the first two hemistiches along with the second hemistich in each following line rhyme. In terms of the poetic form, *ghazal* resembles *qasīdih*. The main difference between these two lyrical modes of poetry is that *qasideh* is considered "public" poetry, while *ghazal* is "private" poetry (Preminger and Brogan 897). Towards the last line of a *ghazal* the poet mentions his or her name. *Ghazal* began to flourish in the 12th century to represent both mystical and secular love thematics. Hence, these two different paths overlap frequently and the result is a deliberate ambiguity. There are other factors that enhance this sense of ambiguity in this form of poetry. For instance, the sex of the beloved is mostly ambiguous since Persian does

not formally distinguish gender. The ambiguity of the sex of the beloved, who is usually called *Sāqī*, is particularly the subject of discussion in Sa'di's *ghazals* that are sometimes read as homosexual. The secular *ghazal* reached its highest level of development in the poems of Sa'di of Shiraz.

In the 14th century, Hafez transformed *ghazal* both in form and content. The two streams of secular and mystical *ghazal* are merged in the poetry of Hafez to shape a new form of *ghazal*. In this new form, the imagery of secular and spiritual poetry are combined and extended to bring multiple levels of meaning to each *ghazal*. As opposed to other poetic modes, in Hafez's *ghazal*, there is no thematic or formal harmony. In *Hafez's Mind and Language,* Baha-o din Khoram-Shahi indicates that in Hafez's poetry[12] the verses look semantically fragmented (20-26). The semantic fragmentation of each couplet of a *ghazal* results in its semantic autonomy. As Khoram-Shahi states, this formal characteristic of Hafez's *ghazals*, as opposed to the former *ghazals* composed by, for instance, Sa'di, is a convention that did not originate in Persian poetics. On the contrary, this is a feature that existed in the *Qur'an* (Kharam-Shahi 1-18). In Khoram-Shahi's words: "the most obvious stylistic feature that is seen in both the *Qur'an* and *Divan of Hafez* is their formal lack of semantic unity" (18). Speaking of Hafez, he goes on to say that: "in his lyrical poems, the verse demonstrates an extraordinary independency, diversity and divergence" (20). These characteristics were not found in the previous form of *ghazal*. What holds each *ghazal* as a poetic unit is its rhythm, "rhyme, and the overall poetic aura" (Khoram-Shahi 22). Khoram-Shahi concludes that although Sa'di influenced Hafez to a great extent, this seemingly fragmented semantic structure of Hafez's *ghazals* is inherited from the non-

linear structure of the *Qur'an*. The disjointed structure of Hafez's ghazal is evident in the following *ghazal*:

زاهد ظاهر پرست از حال ما آگاه نیست — در حق ما هر چه گوید جای هیچ اکراه نیست

در طریقت هر چه پیش سالک آید خیر اوست — در صراط مستقیم ای دل کسی گمراه نیست

تا چه بازی رخ نماید بی دقی خواهیم راند — عرصه شطرنج رندان را مجال شاه نیست

چیست این سقف بلند ساده بسیار نقش — زین معما هیچ دانا در جهان آگاه نیست

این چه استسقاست یا رب وین چه قادر حکمتست — کاین همه زخم نهان هست و مجال آه نیست

صاحب دیوان ما گویی نمی داند حساب — کاندر این طغرا نشان حسبه لله نیست

هر چه خواهد گو بیا و هر چه خواهد گو بگو — کبر و ناز و حاجب و دربان بدین درگاه نیست

بر در میخانه رفتن کار یکرنگان بود — خودفروشان را به کوی می فروشان راه نیست

هر چه هست از قامت ناساز بی اندام ماست — ور نه تشریف تو بر بالای کس کوتاه نیست

بنده پیر خراباتم که لطفش دائم است — ور نه لطف شیخ و زاهد گاه هست و گاه نیست

حافظ ار بر صدر ننشیند ز عالی مشربی است — عاشق دردی کش اندر بند مال و جاه نیست

Falsely pious, of our state are unaware
No offence if their words out hearts tear.

On the path, whatever you meet is for your good
On the straight and the narrow, can't be lost there.

Whatever the rook may play, we'll knock it down
On the chessboard of lovers, Kings won't dare.

What is this multi-patterned, tall, simple dome?

Who is wise to this riddle? Show me where?

Is this your grace, O Lord, powerful, wise?

Too many hidden wounds; no time to catch a breath of air.

It's as if the Judge of our Court is not fair.

This royal seal, sign of God does not bear

Whoever wishes may come, and whatever, may declare.

No guards, no grandeur, this hall is bare

Those who enter the tavern, openly share.

Those who sell themselves, meet the wine-seller's glare

Whatever befalls us is the doing of our affair.

Your grace is not rare, and there's no one you'd spare

I serve the Tavern-Master, with his endless love and care.

Piety, sometimes is cold, sometimes will flare.

Hafiz gracefully declines from taking the head chair

Lovers are free fortune and fame's snare. [13]

It is obvious that in this *ghazal* there is no semantic unity between the couplets. Each verse by itself is an autonomous unit capable of existing independently. Each line conveys a full meaning and, at times, the lines seem to be irrelevant to one another. However, this multi-meaning design of each *ghazal* of Hafez – which deconstructed the pattern of Persian *ghazal* – enriches the *ghazal* and brings a dynamic harmony out of the seeming disharmony. As Khoram-shahi indicates, the

non-linear structure of *ghazal* demands the full attention and meditation (*huzūr'i qalbī*) of the reader in order to comprehend the meaning of each *ghazal* (20).

In the 20th century, when the art of cinematography was introduced to Iranian filmmakers, they – probably unconsciously – adopted and adapted this non-linear approach to the realm of cinema. In a global perspective, history proves how the literary traditions in each culture affect the respective national or regional cinema. For instance, cinema in the West is primarily based on the rich tradition of Western novels and fiction (Mast and Kawin 416). Thus, it is mainly centered on narrative conventions. Japanese cinema, as Keiko McDonald has extensively discussed in *Japanese Classical Theater*, relies more on the dramatic traditions of *kabuki* and *noh* theater. In the Iranian film industry, making poetic films with a semi-linear or non-linear structure is a well-established aesthetic practice. In Iranian poetic films, there is a special interest in making poetic images that could stand beside the narrative part of a film. These images add a poetic impression to the narrative part. In *Sārā* (1993), for instance, Mehrjuei depicts a lonely woman in her daily struggles with life. In addition to narrating the story Sara, Mehrjuei portrays the poetic moments of her isolated life when she secretly sews endless pearls and beads on wedding dresses. In a dim lit setting, the low-angle shots of Sara surrounded – ironically – by a wedding dress that takes up the whole frame reinforce a poetic aura. The *mise-en-scène*, lighting, and the choice of Niki Karimi as Sara, with her innocent but serious face, and her deep gaze in the film underpin a sense of isolation and desperation. Moreover, *Sārā* visually celebrates the colorful life of the Tehran bazaar when it highlights Persian carpets in the old shops. In *Leylā* (1996), the audience is invited to follow the story of the

unfortunate Leila – who cannot have a child and is maliciously forced to find a wife for her husband – through a visually poetic film with many symbolically significant colors. The tinted red shots signify extreme frustration and love, while the tinted yellow shots represent spiritual serenity. Moreover, *Leylā* emphasizes objects such as the traditional samovar and the ritual of tea-drinking, as well as the carnelian beads that signify a good omen and spirituality in a scene that shows Leila's praying. The sound *montage*, accompanied by scenes that show Leila's uncle playing *tār*, registers mystical/spiritual moments in the film. The fascinating architecture of Leila's house, a contemporary house inspired by the traditional architecture of Iranian houses, adds an extra symbolic touch to Mehrjuei's film. These are a few instances of the poetic implications Mehrjuei employs to give poetic meaning to the narrative.

Restoring symbolic cultural and religious implications in a non-linear fashion is not exclusive to Mehrjuei's work. On the contrary, there is a general interest in the Iranian cinematic aesthetics in conveying meaning in a non-syntagmatic manner. Another example is Ali Hatami's filmmaking, which illustrates his fascination with depicting the Iranian lifestyle of the Qajar era. Hatami's successful TV serial, *Hizār Dastān* (1979-99) is accentuated by the elaborate portrayal of Iranian culture and traditions in a transitional era toward the end of the nineteenth century. Hatami masterfully represents how modernity, in the Qajar epoch, is customized and merged into the Iranian lifestyle through a sophisticated *mise-en-scène*. In fact, Hatami built a cinematic town (Shahrak'i Ghazāl), inspired by Qajar architecture, in order to shoot *Hizār Dastān*. The settings, costumes, music, and lighting in this TV serial give it a poetic atmosphere. The "poeticity" of the cinematic work is evident, for instance, in

sequences that were shot in Tehran's Grand Hotel. The rich color and texture in the hotel sequences and traditional costumes and carpets create a poetic and nostalgic space. Other *mise-en-scène*-related examples that bring poetry into *Hezar Dastan* are the representation of calligraphy as well as the traditional notion of Iranian beauty through close-ups of the veiled Jayran[14] – the girl who has a love-affair with a revolutionary character in the movie. Bahram Bayzai, another prominent director of the new wave, employed the poetics of visual arts and Iranian theatrical traditions to examine the challenges of modernity in Iranian society. In chapters three and four, I will explore in detail Bayzai's cinematic vision, rooted in the Iranian literary and performing arts. In Rakhsan Bani-Etamad's *Banū'i Urdībihisht* (*The May Lady*, 1998) this "visual poetics" is complemented with a "verbal poetics" as the contemporary poet Ahmadreza Ahmadi reads his poems throughout the film. Hence, even in Iranian narrative films, non-linear meanings become semantically and visually significant. There is a tendency in Iranian art films to reveal meaning slowly. Apart from the narrative concepts that are portrayed clearly, there are figurative meanings hidden between the lines. The Iranian spectator is familiar with this figurative line of meaning and takes pleasure in being challenged by cinematographic symbols and metaphors.

Kiarostami's cinema is poetic and non-linear in essence. In his film style, however, this poetic mode takes a more abstract turn. Kiarostami, who was trained by Mehrjuei, Sohrab Shahid Sales, and Hatami's filmmaking grammar, crosses the more visually oriented poetics in favor of what I call "abstract poetics" or "philosophical poetics" that is similar to *ghazal*.[15] Unlike directors such as Hatami, Kiarostami does not seek poetic moments in portraying, for instance, the lavish life of a Qajar prince in

a hotel, back-grounded with the rich soundtrack of Badi'-zadegan's unforgettable *Murgh'i Sahar* song – that to Iranian audiences nostalgically signifies Iranians' struggles for freedom during and after the constitutional revolution. Kiarostami's abstract poetics rests in the way he discovers poetry in everyday life, for example, of rural people in remote villages. He does not employ a poetic language nor does he depict spectacular scenes to play on the emotions of the spectators. The language his amateur actors speak is usually a local dialect such as Gilaki or Kurdish, and their performances, which lack any traces of theatricality, do not make the viewer cry or laugh. Besides, Kiarostami avoids using music to heighten the audience's emotions. In most parts of his films audiences are left to concentrate on the proposed concepts in the absence of music, which could be a distracting factor. The philosophical poetry that marks Kiarostami's filmmaking is all about the very essence of everyday life.

If you omit the visual poetry of Hatami's *Hajī Washington* (1982) or Mehrjuei's *Hāmūn* (1990), there is still the narrative meaning germane to these films. In other words, the visual poetics stays in the background to "add" meaning to the body of the main narratives. In Kiarostami's *Khanih'i Dūst Kujāst?* (*Where Is the Friend's House?*, 1987), on the other hand, the poeticism of the film cannot be separated from the story line. It runs through every scene of the film, first and foremost because its twisting narrative shape evades a linear unfolding of the events. This non-linear form, borrowed from the structure of *ghazal* poetry, deconstructs the conventional syntagmatic story line. It is also enhanced by the director's decision not to employ music that could steer audiences' emotions.[16]

Kiarostami's philosophical poetics take root in his filmmaking sensibilities, which take the audience from the seen to the "unseen." In *Where Is the Friend's House?* for instance, the director's ideas are shaped in the form of poetic signs and symbols. The film is a seemingly uncomplicated story about a child named Ahmad who is starting an odyssey to find his friend's house to give him a notebook he mistakenly picked up in school. To prevent his friend being punished by the teacher, he must find his house and deliver the notebook. He is shown asking people for directions to Poshteh, the nearby village up the hill, where his friend lives. Beyond this simple story, however, lies a more complicated story about the concepts of friendship and commitment.

The poeticism of the story of Ahmad resembles the design of *ghazal* based on a specific interpretation of "reality" in mystical poetics, which has no resemblance to the common concept of realism in Western literary and cinematic works. Reality in mysticism is merely a tangible and superficial variation of the truth based on *vahm* or illusion. Narrative poetry or cinema, from the Sufist perspective, could be viewed as "reality" that is illusionist. According to Alireza Raeisian: "narrative storytelling is based on reality of everyday life, which is illusionist because it is based on *vahm*.... The nature of illusion" he says "is medium-oriented" (31-32). Therefore, it functions as an intermediate or medium to narrate a clear-cut story with a precise beginning and ending. In contrast, in *ghazal* poetry, the poet goes beyond this realist/illusionist approach (*bardāsht'i tavahumi*) to embrace the element of *khiyal* or imagination. For a Sufi, the illusionist reality of life merely conceals the truth, while imagination exposes it. Nonetheless, the artist employs the "represented" reality of life, based on

vahm to portray the "un-represented" truth hidden beneath the seen. In this journey from the seen to the unseen, the artist uses words – in *ghazal* – or images – in film – to employ the aspect of *khiyal*, "which is essentially aesthetical and not medium-oriented "(Raeisian 32). This is where the poeticism of *Where Is the Friend's House?* lies. In this film, Kiarostami as a lyrical or *taghazzulī* director employs everyday events but does not rely on the illusionist reality of everyday life. He goes beyond illusion to embrace the imagination in illustrating reality. This imaginary and poetic reality does not rely on a realist/illusionist medium; thus, it is "liberated" from a linear story line with a clear-cut beginning and ending. The film, like a *ghazal*, encompasses a fragmented, unfinished, and ambiguous pattern. Kiarostami's aesthetics in this film is, in Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa's words, enshrined in "a system of narrative based on [...] a sense of metaphysical absences and presences. This system involves a relative freedom from the structure of cause and effect" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 59). This is one of the underlying principles of mystic poetry and philosophy, in which the artist relies on his or her sense of imagination rather than on rational thought and pure observation of events. The meaning in *Where Is the Friend's House?* is not encoded in the outcome of Ahmad's journey to Poshteh. In other words, Kiarostami's aesthetics in this film does not put emphasis on the ending of the story. On the contrary, the spectator should make sense of what he or she sees in the non-linear "stories" that are put together in the story of Ahmad. Thus, *Where Is the Friend's House?* unfolds its meaning in a non-linear fashion, a characteristic of *ghazal* that brings harmony out of the seeming disharmony of a non-narrative film. In the absence of a traditional narrative line, the fragmented images and scenes restore harmony to the film.

By focusing on a seemingly simple problem, Kiarostami attempts to take the spectator away from the plain reality of the journey of a child to reveal the more complex inner journey of a human being who is discovering the essence of friendship in, paradoxically, an early stage of his life. In this way, this film turns out to be purely poetic. The poetry and imagery in the film become interchangeable elements. Although the formal aspects of *ghazal* are thoroughly evident in the film, its poeticism does not cease to be restored in its form. On the other hand, *Where Is the Friend's House?* is a poetic film because of Ahmad's sincere effort to reach humanism and companionship, two crucial facets of Sufism. Therefore, by employing an abstract poeticism, "Kiarostami exercises poetry in cinema" (Raeisian 36). In the next two films of his Rostam-Abad trilogy, Kiarostami masterfully exchanges images for poetic words to further explore the notions of love and friendship in the midst of death and grief.

As a superb manipulator of narrative incidents, he focuses increasingly on slight, seemingly irrelevant details in a story, often obscuring or hiding major plot twists. This is another technique that has enriched his non-linear philosophical cinema. In *Where Is the Friend's House?*, for instance, when the audience is engaged in the story of Ahmad, he or she is to confront various stories. Ahmad's grandfather narrates his account about a foreign engineer. Then the camera focuses on a man who wants to sell wooden doors. Afterwards, the story of Ahmad and his attempts to find the friend's house is once again interrupted to portray an old man whose profession is making old-fashioned wooden windows. Ahmad asks him the direction to his friend's house; conversely, he talks to Ahmad in a detailed manner about his profession, his

life, the villagers, and life in general. The audience, impatiently waiting to see if Ahmad finally finds his friend's house, should still wait to view a beautiful showcase of the windows in a twisted alley in the dark while the old man is sharing his philosophical ideas with Ahmad.

Another example of inserting seemingly irrelevant details into the line of the so-called main story is seen in the first scene of *Namā'i Nazdīk* (*Close Up*, 1990). A reporter from a weekly magazine is informed that a movie fan named Sabizian has been arrested. The first sequence portrays the reporter, accompanied by two soldiers and a driver, heading to make a report about this arrest. Sabzian is in reality an impoverished bookbinder. But he falsely introduced himself to a Tehrani family, the Ahankhahs, as the prominent director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf. Once the spectators get to see the Ahankhahs' house, though, they are not privileged to view the inside of the house and the scene of his arrest. Instead, the viewers remain outside to watch the driver who is picking some flowers from the pile of leaves and kicking a spray can. In other words, the audience has to miss the "central" part of the plot at this stage, the meeting with the deceived family and Sabzian. Although the spectators finally get to see the restaged arresting incident later in the film, at this point Kiarostami finds a chance to break the chain of narrative story that enriches and de-centers the narrative by embedding another story into the first one. Again, this fragmented style of filmmaking is reminiscent of the structure of *ghazal* with its semantically autonomous lines.

This disintegrated aesthetics in Kiarostami's film style is also achieved by his image-oriented approach. For instance, from time to time the director abandons the

narrative part of a film in favor of static and photographic scenes. The most significant example in *Where Is the Friend's House?* is a long shot in which Ahmad is climbing a twisted road on the hill with a single tree. This photographic effect is enhanced, as the audience is to view the same image-like shot more than once. In another instance, we see the long shot of the village of Koker with olive trees. These images by themselves could be seen as fragmented mini-themes of his films. Thus, the fragmented structure of the film enables the director to capture more than one single theme. This invitation to study images instead of a cinematic narrative, however, is not exclusive to *Where Is the Friend's House?* In Kiarostami's later films, such as *Zindigī va Dīgar Hīch* (*Life and then Nothing*, 1992) and *Zīr'i Dirakhtān'i Zeytūn* (*Through the Olive Trees*, 1994), this approach is fostered and furthered. *Life and then Nothing* is about a director and his son who take a trip from Tehran to the quake-struck region of Manjil in order to find out whether the lead characters of *Where Is the Friend's House?* are alive. In this film, instead of fully focusing on the director's search for the boys, Kiarostami takes "distracting" long takes through the front, rear, and side windows of the filmmaker's car to portray the landscape. These photographic shots of the natural landscape encode Kiarostami's engagement with a non-narrative poetic style. What makes this non-linear film even less narrative-based is the ending when the spectator – who by now has seen many minor actors from *Where Is the Friend's House?* – is disappointed by not learning whether Babak and Ahmad, the lead characters of the earlier film, are alive.

As I discussed, the non-linear structure of *ghazal* has influenced Kiarostami's non-narrative aesthetics. This method originates in a "spatial" approach – deeply

rooted in the Iranian psyche (Haq-shenas 184) – that is inherited from the structure of *ghazal*s of Hafez. Before engaging with my main argument regarding the spatial structure of Kiarostami's filmmaking, I should discuss the spatiality of Hafez's poetry, which has been the subject of debate and uncertainty among the Hafezologists.

In his seminal work *Hafez's Mind and Language*, Khoram-shahi meticulously explores the fragmented stylistics of Hafez's *ghazals*. Other scholars in this area have further examined this issue and presented new ideas in terms of the formal characteristics of *ghazal*. For instance, Alimohamad Haq-shenas, using the Chomskian linguistic model, has made a distinction between the surface structure and the deep structure of *ghazal* to come up with a solution for the fragmentary composition of this poetic mode. He asserts that it is merely "the surface structure of *ghazal* in the *Divan* of Hafez [that] is fragmented, while its deep structure is non-linear [but] 'circular', or 'spherical'" (177). [17] Therefore, according to Haq-shenas, the meaning in a *ghazal* of Hafez is only superficially fragmented. Hence, the unity of meaning should be sought beyond the immediate literal meaning, because as Khoram-shahi clarifies, the *ghazals* of Hafez, "evade a linear or one-dimensional structure to take up a polygonal shape" (20). Khoram-shahi indicates that this "spherical" structure of *ghazal* makes it possible to read it from wherever you wish and end it wherever you want to. Neither Haq-shenas nor Khoram-shahi clarifies whether *ghazal*'s form should be considered as polygonal, spherical, or circular.

Khoram-shahi and Haq-shenas' publications motivated more scholars to investigate this matter. However, it is noteworthy that Hafez's deviation from the original structure of *ghazal* was a matter of critical debate before these recent

investigations. For instance, more than ninety years ago, the Iranian historian and linguist Ahmad Kasravi observed this issue and concluded that "the haphazard" structure of *ghazal* results from the poet's fancy for a new form with no sustaining logic at all (Baraheni, vol. I 544). Modern critics, on the other hand, tried to come up with a logical reason for the non-linearity of *ghazal*. In Haq-shenas's opinion, what stand behind this circular or spherical approach are two seminal notions of "origin" and "center" in the Islamic-Iranian culture, which values the roots and origin and is highly center-oriented (179). "In a center-oriented culture," he says, "the seemingly fragmented units are all related to one another through their connection to the center. It does not matter whether these bits and pieces are well-matched with one another" (179). As opposed to Khoram-shahi, Haq-shenas believes that the circular facet of Hafez's *ghazal* – resulted from a fragmented surface structure – is not exclusively found in the *Qur'an*. On the contrary, this is an important element of Eastern and Iranian philosophies and cultures. In "The Persian Verse and Hafez's Poetry," Baraheni investigates the same matter by referring to Khoram-shahi's significant treatise. As Baraheni clarifies, although the impact of *Qur'an* on Hafez's poetry is inevitable, the fragmented structure of his *ghazal* refers to a more recent historical incident in Hafez's time: the invasion by the Mongols and their successors. According to Baraheni, the Mongol domination of Shiraz and the subsequent anarchy had made the poet's existence irrelevant. He was imprisoned in his hometown, and so was his poetry in verse. "Hafez saw the world," Baraheni says, "as fragmented and instantaneous, as a result, his poetry was directed to a mystical condensation" with verse as its formal and semantic frame of reference (550).

The motive behind the specific structure of Hafez's *ghazal* could be the impact of the *Qur'an* or the tyranny of the Mongol followers in Shiraz. Nevertheless, the end result is to denote a sense of imprisonment, but in a non-linear structure that has been and still is the focus of debate among Persian literary critics. Khoram-shahi and Haq-shenas' discussion of the formal and semantic structure of *ghazal* seems contradictory and/or unclear in many ways. For instance, at one point, Khoram-shahi regards each *ghazal* as a whole semantic unit. He goes on to say, "Hafez's *ghazal* forms a polygonal volume in the readers' mind. His style resembles a rose bud, which is growing in a 'circular' fashion. Its formation is circular or 'spherical'" (20). Hence, as Baraheni observes (550), in identifying *ghazal* with different shapes such as circular, spherical, or a polygon, Khoram-shahi shows a certain inconsistency. Moreover, he declares that the harmony in Hafez's poetry is to be sought in the verse, not in the poem as a whole (25). In each *ghazal*, Khoram-shahi believes, there are a number of autonomous images or themes introduced. Therefore, in order to grasp meaning in a *ghazal*, the reader is free to read verses arbitrarily, and not in the order in which they were originally written. While Khoram-shahi's examination of the autonomy of verse is accurate,[18] the reader could still observe a harmony – at least – in the formal and rhythmic aspects of *ghazal*. Thus this harmony, contrary to Haq-shenas' statement, does not rely on the deep structure of a *ghazal*. Even if we make a distinction between surface and deep structures of *ghazal*, this harmony would partially reside in its surface or formal structure. In fact, because of the rhythmic unity of *ghazal*, Hafez's poems lend themselves perfectly to musical performance.

In conclusion, I believe it is more suitable to describe *ghazal* as a non-linear and "spatial" structure that cannot be attributed to any particular shape or volume. This spatial structure was a deviation from the original *ghazal* that flourished in the 12th century. Hafez transformed the concept of *ghazal* to create a non-linear poetic composition. This spatiality that was manifested in the structure of *ghazal* is now represented in many aspects of Iranian culture. The spatial universe of Persian poetry influenced non-narrative cinema that is based on images and icons as opposed to a narrative center. This influence is particularly embodied in Kiarostami's filmmaking as the best example of *Sīnimā'i Taghazzulī* in Iran.

The spectator could see the spatial universe of Kiarostami's films in self-contained and self-referring schemes. Whether or not the viewer is consciously aware of this cultural-specific spatial discourse, he or she realizes that Kiarostami's films cannot be read transparently. On the contrary, they are ambiguous texts that should be examined and re-read meticulously. In the absence of narrative aesthetics, the spectator becomes sensitive to images and their symbolic meanings, in the same way Persians read Hafez's poetry. For instance, the scene in which the driver shoots a canister in *Close Up* becomes symbolically significant when the spectator views a similar shot while the reporter rolls the same can in the same street. Moreover, in *Bād mā rā bā Khud Khāhad Burd* (*Wind Will Carry Us*, 1999), the zigzagging rolling apple recalls the canister images in *Close Up*. As Rosenbaum points out, "considering the recurrence of such paths and patterns in Kiarostami's work, from the zigzagging path in *Where Is the Friend's House?* to the kicked spray can in *Close Up*, they virtually amount to a directorial signature" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 35).

As discussed before, in Hafez's poetry, each verse or couplet can stand as an independent semantic unit (Baraheni 96-97).[19] Baraheni indicates that "in each verse a complete image is offered. In some cases, however, the image exceeds the first verse to the second" (295). The first two verses of *ghazal* no.1 of *Divan* illuminate this idea:

الا یا ایها ساقی ادر کاسا و ناولها
که عشق آسان نمود اول ولی افتاد مشکل ها
بیوی نافه ای کاخر صبا زان طره بگشاید
ز تاب جعد مشکینش چه خون افتاد در دلها

Oh! Beautiful wine bearer, bring forth the cup and put it to my lips
Path of love seemed easy at first, what came was many hardships.
With its perfume, the morning breeze unlocks those beautiful locks
The curl of those dark ringlets, many hearts to shreds strips.

The unity of each *ghazal* depends, partially, on each verse. Beyond that, the *ghazal* as a whole is a harmonious unit. In Kiarostami's filmmaking style we encounter a similar situation. In his aesthetics, the scene/image functions as a self-contained unit. At the same time, each film, as a collection of images, is a congruent whole. The autonomous but interrelated images and stories in *Life and then Nothing* is an example that has already been discussed. This approach is furthered in *Dah* (*Ten* 2002) with its ten dependent and at the same time interrelated parts.

In this manner, Kiarostami's filmmaking resembles Hafez's poetry in its conscious manipulation of form. The most fundamental element of Hafez's *ghazal*

poetry is its formal structure or its language. Generally speaking, what makes a poem poetry is the arrangement of words (or its formal structure) in the first place.[20] Similarly, what makes Kiarostami's films poetic is their formal structure, the editing or lack of editing, *mise-en-scène*, and so forth. Like in Hafez's poetry, in Kiarostami's films the meaning is, to a great extent, signified by form instead of content. In a narrative film or a novel, the shots or words refer to the concrete reality in the outside world. Thus, the form in a narrative literary work or film refers to a specific culture and society along with its historical background. *Ghazal* as a form of mystical poetry, on the contrary, does not specify a certain time or space since it does not depict illusionist reality. Words, in their poetic and imaginative form, treat time as a timeless commodity. They could have immediate social and historical meanings. Beyond that, however, the verses of a *ghazal* have a universal meaning that could apply to the past, present or future. Therefore, even a reader who is not familiar with the history of Shiraz in the age of Hafez could understand his poetry and apply it to his or her present condition. In a similar fashion, in a poetic film such as *Taste of Cherry*, the language does not signify a specific time. This film does not explore a concrete reality in the outside world. In other words, this film does not intend to portray a "story" about a man who wants to commit suicide. On the contrary, the story of this man, Badi'i is a universal story of humans and the way they challenge and question notions such as life and death. By portraying the story of Badi'i, Kiarostami moves from a narrative about a specific man in a specific place to a timeless story about problematizing the notions and life and death. Thus, this film can be interpreted as related to the present situation,

or the past, or future possibilities. It is about life with all its complexities, from the beginning to eternity.

The form in both Hafez's *ghazals* and Kiarostami's films, however, is not segregated from the content. Both the poet and the director draw on artistic forms to articulate their philosophical points. In *ghazal* and lyrical cinema, the ambiguity of form gives rise to a variety of interpretations. Because of their poetic timeless approach, both Kiarostami and Hafez were and still are condemned for being indifferent to the social and political realities of their societies and not deserving the global attention they have received (Saeed-Vafa 50 and Yahya Aryan-pour quoted in Baraheni 731). When Iran was undergoing the aftermath of a revolution and was facing war with Iraq, Kiarostami illustrated everyday issues in relatively peaceful environments. In the same way, Hafez, living under the tyranny of Amir Mobarez o-din Mozafar in Shiraz, was versifying about a hedonistic life, drinking wine, and an imaginary beloved instead of focusing on the social and political situation of his time. The ambiguity of style as well as a universal and humanist approach in Hafez's *ghazals* and Kiarostami's films make them semantically multi-layered or polysemous. Apart from the literal or immediate meanings of *ghazal* and lyrical cinema, mostly related to the historical realities of their time, they have allegorical meanings, too. In general, there are two different layers in poetic language, the first being its literal and linguistic meaning, and the second its poetic meaning, which elevates it from its purely linguistic level to a spatial, poetic ambiance. This poetic signification moves an artistic expression out of historical and visual reality and into an abstract form of reality, which is able to transcend history. Like Hafez's poetry, Kiarostami's

filmmaking goes beyond "current" issues to embark upon philosophical questions about life.

In the discussion thus far, the relations between *ghazal* and the lyrical aesthetics of Kiarostami have been illustrated from a formal perspective. In addition to the formal influences of Hafez's poetry on Kiarostami's cinematic sensibilities, *ghazal* has had thematic effects on Kiarostami's filmmaking. For instance, asking for directions, a common theme in the mystical poetry of Hafez, is a recurring topic in Kiarostami's films. This verse from the second *ghazal* of Hafez depicts the poet's concern for this issue:

چو کحل بینش ما خاک آستان شماست کجا رویم بفرما از این جناب کجا

My eye-liner is the dust of your door and fence

Where shall I go, tell me, you command me whence

Asking for directions symbolizes the Sufi's quest to find the "friend," a term repeatedly used to refer to God. In the journey to *Ishrāq* or illumination, a Sufi seeks his leader's guide. The leader or guide in Sufism is personified as the archetypal wise old man. In *Where Is the Friend's House?*, this image is represented by depicting the old door-maker who goes about helping Ahmad find his friend's place. The sequence shows the old man and Ahmad moving through the twisting back alleys of the village in the dark. To set a poetic mood, occasional light beams shine through the traditional wooden windows while the man philosophizes about life – probably depicting the director's own philosophical concerns. The old man is the only person who listens to Ahmad's concern. He is the one who offers him a hand in finding the friend's house. He tells Ahmad about his art crafts (wooden windows and cribs) and how they are

getting lost in the ugly world of metal and modernity. In viewing the old man, the spectator feels nostalgic for an old world that is dying. Ahmad thus represents youth with humanist concerns. The relationship between the door-maker and Ahmad is reminiscent of the relation of the leader (*murād* or *pīr* in Sufism) and the pupil (*murīd*) depicted in Hafez's poems as in this passage:

به می سجاده رنگین کن گرت پیر مغان گوید که سالک بی خبر نبود ز راه و رسم منزلها

With wine color your robe, one of the old magi's best
tips
Trust in this traveler's tips, who knows of many paths and trips

As the old man and young boy go on, the old man, already tired, asks Ahmad to leave him behind and continue his quest. Here Kiarostami deconstructs the conventional relationship of *murīd/murād*. In this case, *murīd* is the one who takes the lead.

In the next film of the trilogy, the person who was playing the old man acts as his real character, a resident in Poshteh after the earthquake. He is shown carrying a toilet to install it in the new house he is building after the earthquake. This time his philosophical concerns take an ironical twist. In *Where Is the Friend's House?* he represents the *murād* or "purveyor of truth" as Rosenbaum puts it (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 18), while in *Life and then Nothing* he is criticizing art and cinema in general, and Kiarostami's authorial power in particular.[21] He acknowledges his role in the former film and condemns Kiarostami for making him play an old hunchback. By showing the same man as a younger person, with different and less general concerns

about life, Kiarostami endorses the re-visiting of old concepts such as the spiritual leader or *murād*.

In *Life and then Nothing,* it is the director who is asking for directions in frequent stops along his way. Asking for directions in Kiarostami's movies is a philosophical concern illustrated by Persian poets such as Khayyam, with his philosophical pessimism, or in Hafez's ontological questions about life, and Rumi's mystical wandering and wondering.[22] Both Ahmad and the director (Kiarostami's alter ego) in *Life and then Nothing* represent the philosophical uncertainty inherited from Persian Sufism in general, and *ghazal* in particular.

There is another theme reminiscent of *ghazal* in Kiarostami's image-oriented aesthetics. The image of ruins is a recurring key icon that is directly borrowed from Hafez's *ghazal* (Saeed-Vafa 59). For example, the image of the rubble left after a devastating earthquake in *Life and then Nothing* or the construction sites in *Ta'm-e Gilas* (*Taste of Cherry*, 1996) are representations of ruins in his films. The illustration of ruins, to the Iranian spectator, signifies a mystic notion mostly associated with Hafez's poetry. It should be noted that the image of ruins in the mystical poetry of Hafez does not modestly refer to devastation or despair. On the contrary, it refers to an elitist isolation of the Sufi in his quest to find absolute truth. This matter is reflected in the following verses by Hafez:

در خرابات مغان نور خدا می بینم　　این چه نوری است خدایا ز کجا می بینم

In the ruins of the magis I see God

What is this? How can I see it?[23]

بیا ساقی آن بکر مستور مست　　که اندر خرابات دارد نشست

به من ده که بد نام خواهم شدن　　خراب می و جام خواهم شدن

Come bearer, that wholesome drunk

Who is forever in the tavern sunk

Give me, ill repute bring to my name

The cup and wine I shall only blame

It also suggests the state of a thinker who refuses the norms of his/her society. In contrast to the mosque, church, and monastery, where "order" and "harmony" are maintained and institutionalized, the ruins are a refuge for drunken *rinds* who reject the monotonous world of the ascetic Muslim. *Rindī* (hedonism), which was a "disregard of conventional morality in pursuit of pleasures of music, drink, sex, and drugs" was one aspect of life in Shiraz in Hafez's era (Limbert 73). As Limbert points out, this "desire to ignore the dictates of both reason and religion is what Hafez evokes so beautifully in his poetry" (73). A Sufi prefers the state of *rindī* (hedonism) and the freedom it brings to *zohd* (asceticism), which is usually tied in with hypocrisy. It is in the ruins of a tavern that an unconventional *rind* is able to meditate and also embrace the more colorful and joyful life of the sinner. The residents of "the house of ruins" – or what Hafez called *manzel-e viraneh* or *kharabat* – are those who rejoice in earthly life, not those who believe in the other world:

دوش از مسجد سوی میخانه آمد پیر ما　　چیست یاران طریقت بعد از این تدبیر ما

Last night the Master left the mosque for the tavern

Is there any other choice left to us?

The imagery of ruins in Kiarostami's films evokes the depth of a thinker's loneliness and isolation and the challenge to accepted societal conventions. Like a *rind*, a modern intellectual evades the institutionalized order to embrace natural disorder reminiscent of an isolated land.

What makes Kiarostami's filmmaking unique is his approach to film as a poetic form that is specifically inspired by the Persian *ghazal*. In the mainstream narrative-oriented cinema, the story runs sequentially or syntagmatically. His non-narrative aesthetics brings a *taghazzulī* or lyrical aura into cinema that endorses a purely aesthetical cinema based on imagination rather than illusionist reality. In Kiarostami's own terms:

> The problem with narrative films is that people from all walks of life come out of watching it with the same story. Non-narrative film allows people to use their own mind, frames and experiences, and walk out with experiences they have created from watching the film … I like films that have lasting power where you come out and immediately or much later begin to reconstruct what happened. I like to put you to sleep, let you have a nap, but afterwards make you stay up at night thinking. (Harvard Film Archives, 7 June 2000, qtd in Fischer 259)

Kiarostami's filmmaking as an offshoot of *ghazal*, with its imaginary-oriented structure, has a tendency to simultaneity over sequentiality. When his latest film, *Ten*, was premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2002, Kiarostami stated:

> Sometimes, I tell myself that *Ten* is a film that I could never make again. You cannot decide to make such a film... It's a little like *Close-Up*. It's possible to continue along the same path but it requires a great deal of patience. Indeed, this is not something that can be repeated easily. It must occur of its own accord, like an incident or a happening...At the same time, it requires a great deal of preparation. Originally, this was the story of a psychoanalyst, her patients and her car, but that was two years ago.... (qtd in Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 124)

In other words, Kiarostami does not intend "to continue along the same path." Each work "happens" to him like an incident. As the director declares, the meaning is constructed simultaneously in *Ten*. For Kiarostami, making a film should "occur" "like an incident or happening" "on its own accord." This echoes Mohammadreza Shafi'i-Kadkani's famous phrase that reads: "Poetry is an accident which occurs in language."[24] Kiarostami's films develop their meaning simultaneously through space, not through time in a conventional linear fashion.

The spectator captures Kiarostami's cinematic world in a spatial approach or in a moment in time, rather than as a sequence. The "unity" of his films is not to be grasped unless the audience watches them in a spatial manner rather than a traditional linear fashion. The unit of meaning in his film style is in most cases the sequence or even the shot/image, rather than an extended narrative. In this way, Kiarostami joins directors such as Yasujiro Ozu and Robert Bresson who approached filmmaking by integrating the two genres of poetry and film.

From Poetic Conventions to Cinematic Innovations

Inspired by the structure of *ghazal*, Kiarostami's aesthetics is non-linear, fragmented, and spatial. In narrating his stories, Kiarostami avoids a conventional and cohesive narrative in favor of creating gaps that should be filled in by the audience. Therefore, the audience gets to participate in the "game" of completing the meaning of his films. This idea is reinforced by the director's view that "when you see a film, you should come away with your own interpretation, based on who you are. The film should allow that to happen, make room for that interaction" (qtd in Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 107). In this "unfinished" stylistics, the spectator takes part to semantically finish the film. In his later films, such as *Wind Will Carry Us* or *Ten*, this technique is taken to the point where the films seem thoroughly incomplete without the audience's contribution. Employing nonprofessional actors, the lack of resolution or ending in his films, long shots and extreme long shots with a detachment effect on the audience, narrative ellipsis and ambiguity, are the techniques he uses to achieve an unfinished and interactive end product. In this section, I examine these approaches to illuminate how poetic conventions present an innovative cinematic language to the world.

In the process of constructing the meaning in Kiarostami's films, it is not only the audience who participates. The actors have a vital role in shaping the films, too, as most of his films are not based on a fixed written scenario. The nonprofessional actors in his films do not memorize lines but extemporize, as he admitted in an interview with Rosenbaum (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 111). When Kiarostami premiered his digital film, *Moonlight*, in London (2004), he acknowledged that he achieved the best

results when he did not interfere in his actors' performance. "That is when incidents happen automatically", he says, "I believe we directors both make and destroy, because we tend to make things artificial. We ask our actors to forget themselves and obey our commands."[25] However, Kiarostami has stayed away from the approach he is criticizing here. Since his films are not based on fixed scenarios and the actors are amateurs, his films represent a natural flow. Because actors extemporize, their words are often "the unthinkable structure of the unconscious," in Lacan's words (Lucy 23).

The non-linear structure of his films is partially the result of narrative ellipsis. Narrative ellipsis is evident, for instance, in *Life and Then Nothing* while the main theme of the story is finding out about Babak and Ahmad, the actual movie does not take the audience to the "main point." We get to see the other actors but have to wait to find out if Babak and Ahmad are still alive. The movie finishes without the audience's expectations being fulfilled. This lack of resolution and deliberate narrative ellipsis provide the missing parts in the narrative.

For the sake of ambiguity, Kiarostami deletes a portion of the soundtrack in the final sequences of both *Mashq'i Shab (Homework*, 1990) and *Close Up*. In *Homework* Kiarostami shuts off the soundtrack when children are reciting religious war chants. This act creates a comic situation that ultimately serves as a detachment effect. It stops the spectator from getting absorbed in the narrative; instead, the audience becomes conscious of its place as the "spectator" who is observing a comic scene, not as part of the narrative. In *Close Up* when Sabzian is released from jail, he gets to meet with Makhmalbaf, his hero, for the first time. The viewer expects to see how the two men are going to interact. However, the conversation between them is not

heard. Instead the spectator hears a conversation between members of the film crew talking about a technical problem in recording the sound. It is not known if the soundtrack was meant to be turned off or – as reported in the film – it is a failure of the sound equipment, but in any case, it has a distancing effect on the audience, which is left to guess about the conversation between the two men. In a similar way, Kiarostami deliberately does not show the old woman whose death the film crew members are awaiting or the man who is digging a hole in *The Wind Will Carry Us*. Generally speaking, there are always more things missing than represented in his narrative. These missing parts are either not provided or delayed.

As mentioned, in Kiarostami's aesthetics the spectator's expectations of a clear-cut narrative and a focus on central characters are not fulfilled. This is illustrated in *Homework*. In this film, in which students in a poor neighborhood in Tehran are surveyed regarding their homework, the audience does not see an emphasis on any specific student. In other words, *Homework* is not built around a specific student. In his next film, although the main story is about Ahmad, the narrative is interrupted quite a few times by alternative stories, along with the detailed portrayal of Ahmad's mother, grandmother, and his infant sibling.

In all of these films, Kiarostami's camera does not affect his characters. The camera is invisible, outside and detached. Kiarostami's use of amateur actors is successful in presenting down-to-earth performances that resemble the lives of these characters in real settings. In portraying the events, his camera constantly switches from an objective perspective to a subjective one. It is objective when it acts in a detached and invisible way. The use of long shots enhances this approach. The camera

only becomes subjective when it serves as the character's eye. In *Where Is the Friend's House?*, for instance, we witness the adult world through Ahmad's eyes, or in *Taste of Cherry* and *Life and then Nothing* we examine suburban Tehran and the roads through the eyes of the drivers. Also when Kiarostami himself appears in his films, – as he does in *Homework* and *Taste of Cherry* – the camera is consciously subjective, referring to Kiarostami as the authorial power. His filmmaking conveys a continuity of time and space. This switching from a subjective to an objective perspective and vise versa brings a realistic/non-dramatic perception, which demands greater participation on the part of the viewer. In Kiarostami's films, the viewer is not drawn into the image. Instead, he or she stays outside the story and judges it with critical eyes. In addition, Kiarostami's use of irony reinforces the detached approach. Kiarostami's irony is examined in the second chapter.

The Descending or Transcending of Adam/ Mr. Badi'i?

Kiarostami's Palme d'Or-winning *Taste of Cherry* is about having freedom of choice in a society that dictates morality to its citizens. In this film, Mr. Badi'i, who wants to commit suicide, questions orthodox morality, which considers man as God's creation who should surrender to God's will. He evades the Islamic modes of objectivity in favor of making a choice to end his life. As a result, *Taste of Cherry* as an artistic interpretation of life that is not contained within the religious boundaries of Iranian society. Kiarostami's humanistic approach in *Taste of Cherry* raises man above culture.

Badi'i is a daring and questioning man who is looking for someone to assist him in committing suicide. What he expects from this potential assistant is to call him

three times the day after he commits suicide. The person whom he hired has to toss a few stones at him. If Badi'i is still alive, he should help him get out of the grave, but if Badi'i is dead, he should bury him and collect the money left in the dashboard of Badi'i's car. In his journey to the outskirts of Tehran, he meets with three people. Each of these people represents a different stage he is to accomplish in his search for the meaning of life and death. Badi'i's journey resembles the stages a Sufi should pass through in his or her spiritual growth. These stages are called *Maqāmāt va Ahvāl'i Sūfi*. The first person Badi'i meets is from Kurdistan. Ironically – since Kurds are well known for being brave warriors, not only in Iran but also in Syria, Turkey, and Iraq – this is a young but timid soldier. As soon as Mr. Badi'i proposes his plans, the soldier runs away. This incident creates an ironic scene that distances the spectator from the depressing setting of the story of a man who intends to end his life. Badi'i leaves this man behind, symbolically passing the immaturity related to youth and lack of experience.

The second person is an Afghani seminarian. He looks older and to some extent bolder than the soldier. He is a man of God who believes in no choice but living and not ending your life. The seminarian and Badi'i signify the two conflicting ideologies of poetic and ascetic worldviews rooted respectively in Eraghi and Khorasani mystical schools of thought. The neo-platonic ideas of *Eraghi* mysticism, as Driush Ashuri illuminates (*Mysticism* 36), are well presented by Ebn-e Arabi and Nasafi and rooted in rational thought and the notion of causality; Khorasani Sufism is based on emotional feelings, hope, and worship, and articulated in a poetic and mysterious language. This school of thought is perfectly represented in *Kashf ol-Asrar*

by Meibodi and *Mersad-o Ebad* by Naghm-o din Razi and later developed in Hafez's *ghazals*. Khorasani-oriented poets and thinkers, such as Hafez, eschewed rational thought and logic in favor of a poetic and affectionate interpretation of the story of Genesis, in particular, and life in general (Ashuri, *Mysticism* 73). The following conversation between the seminarian and Badi'i illustrates the conflict between the two philosophies:

> BADIEI. I have decided to free myself from this life. As for the reason, it doesn't help you and I cannot tell it either. Even if I do, you wouldn't understand. It's not because you don't understand. I mean you can't "feel"[26] what I feel. You may understand it, sympathize, and show your compassion, but you cannot feel it....That's why I ask you as a Muslim to help me.
>
> SEMINARIAN. Yes, I understand you. But suicide is wrong. Since the Hadiths, our 12 Imams and the Qur'an refer to suicide and say that man must not kill himself. The body is a token granted by God and man should not torment his body. I understand you. But suicide viewed from every angle is not the right thing to do.....
>
> BADIEI. I know that suicide is among the deadly sins but living unhappily is a sin, too.... I think God is so great and merciful he cannot see his creatures suffer. That he doesn't want to force us to live. That's why he grants him this solution. Have you ever thought about the logic behind this?

From Badi'i's perspective, God is a compassionate lover who is concerned and cares for his creatures. Unlike the Afghani seminarian, whose relation to God is one of inferiority to the Lord, Badi'i's feeling toward God is that of a mutual relation between lover and beloved, both of whom impatiently search for one another. This conflict of ideas is highlighted in the film by the shot/reverse shot filming of the scene. In these shot/reverse-angle shots, Badi'i and the seminarian are never seen in the same shot together, to highlight the fact that they belong to the two worldviews of poetic mysticism and asceticism. Badi'i's poetic view towards life reminds us of the passionate rind portrayed in Hafez's poetry. In the *rind*'s universe, the relationship with God is not a static one of God/creator and man/creature. On the contrary, this relationship is a dynamic and mutual relation of two comrades, or lovers. Like a *rind*, Badi'i is in search of meaning for his life; he is thoughtful and contemplative, a mad man in his sanity.

In fact, the story of Badi'i in *Taste of Cherry* takes you back to the story of Adam, the first man and according to Sufis, the first *rind*. Incidentally, the history of poetic Sufism itself goes back to a perceptive interpretation of the story of Genesis in the *Qur'an*. As Driush Ashuri clarifies (*Mysticism* 64), unlike previous Semitic-based religions, i.e. Judaism and Christianity – especially the latter, whose main emphasis is on mankind's original sin – there is no such emphasis in the *Qur'an*. Humankind, according to *Qur'an*, is God's best friend, his deputy or caliph. This is specifically underlined in a chapter of the *Qur'an*, *Sūrih Bagharih*, 2:29-32:

> When your Lord said to the angels: "I am placing on the earth one that shall rule as My Deputy," they replied: "Will You put there one that will

do evil and shed blood, when we have for so long sung Your praises and sanctified Your name?

He said: " I know what you do not know."

He taught Adam the names of all things and then set them before the angels, saying: "Tell Me the names of these, if what you say be true."

"Glory to You," they replied, "we have no knowledge except that which You have given us. You alone are wise and all-knowing."

Then He said to Adam: "Tell them their names." And when Adam had named them, He said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth…?

[…] Then Adam received commandments from his Lord, and his Lord relented towards him. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful.[27]

In the Qur'anic version of the story of Adam and Eve, God forgave their sins immediately. What is emphasized about man here is his knowledge, which is a token of God's eternal knowledge, ironically obtained through eating from the forbidden tree. Man, as God's caliph, and the first *rind* according to Sufis, descends to the world of mortals to "discover" the mystery of life and "the logic behind the existence of the universe and human kind" (Ashuri, *Mysticism* 47). This matter is portrayed in Hafez's *ghazals* several times and emphasized in this infamous verse by Hafez that reads:

آسمان بار امانت نتوانست کشید قرعه فال به نام من بیچاره فتاد

The angels couldn't bear the burden

Therefore, the man had to take the mission

Hence, sin has made human beings knowledgeable and powerful rather than sinful and corrupt. This sinful but knowledgeable man is the *rind* who, according to the Sufi worldview and Hafez's poetry, is privileged over the rational fundamentalist, known in Persian as *Insān'i Zāhid* or the ascetic.

It is through the discovery of the meaning of life that the Sufi's life is transformed and Sufism is founded, because as Ashuri indicates, the task of a Sufi is to "discover" the logic behind the existence of the universe and humankind (*Mysticism* 47). Badi'i is a modern *rind* who abandons religious mysticism (*Irfān'i Zāhidānih*) to embrace a more playful, courageous, and questioning version of mysticism called poetic mysticism (*Irfān'i Rindānih*). Being a *rind*, he dares to question and challenge his creator, too. In Kiarostami's philosophy, rooted in Hafez's ontological thought, the concept of change is crucial. Being a *rind* is all about "becoming" and not "being." It is in this journey to become that man discovers the meaning of life.

The third person whom Badi'i meets is a Turkish taxidermist who works in the museum of natural history. The three men who confront Badi'i are all from ethnic minorities in Iran. This matter evokes, as Michael Fischer points out, "the strong communal life of Iran's ethnic minorities in contrast to the anomie of middle-class Tehrani (Badi'i)" (240-41). The taxidermist resembles the old man in *Where Is the Friend's House?*, since he acts as a guide or what in Sufism is called a *Pīr*. Again we see the *pīr* who is giving both physical as well as spiritual directions to a lost person. While they are driving up a hilly road, the taxidermist asks Badi'i to turn left. Badi'i says:

BADI'I. But I don't know this road.

> TAXIDERMIST. Well, I do. Turn left. It's longer but more beautiful. have been the prisoner of this desert for 35 years now.

He is aware of the power of making choices in life. During their conversation in the car, he is the one who talks most of the time and Badi'i is the listener. He tells Badi'i that once, when he was contemplating suicide, he gave up the idea merely for the taste of mulberries:

> TAXIDERMIST. Finally, I was so fed up that I decided to end it all. One morning before dawn, I put a rope in my car. My mind was made up.... I reached mulberry gardens. I stopped. Still dark. I threw the rope over a tree. But it didn't catch hold.... So I climbed the tree and tied the rope tight. Then I felt something soft under my hand. It was mulberry, sweet ones. I ate the first and the second and the third. Suddenly I noticed it wasn't dark anymore.

The taxidermist's words reveal his poetic worldview. It also echoes a sentence by the Romanian-French philosopher E. M. Cioran: "Without the possibility of suicide, I would have killed myself long ego" (qtd. in Fischer 241). This is the inspiring idea that motivated Kiarostami in the making of *Taste of Cherry* (Fischer 241). From his perspective, the world is far from being perfect but there is still a lot of promise to be discovered even in the simplest things, such as the taste of cherries:

> TAXIDERMIST. Have you lost all hope? Have you ever looked at the sky when you wake up in the morning? At dawn, don't you want to see the Sun rise?...The night at the full moon?... Refusing them all, you want to give up the taste of cherry?

Through the taxidermist, Mr. Bagheri, the audience enters the garden of Persian poetic philosophy, introduced by philosophers such as Khayyam and Hafez who would choose the immediate pleasures of this world over the best of the other world.[28] In Bagheri's mind, the world is the representation of beauty, love and hope despite all its misfortunes and unhappiness. Like a Sufi, Bagheri is a lover, a mad man in his sanity, thoughtful and in search of a reason to live. Both Mr. Badi'i and the taxidermist are the portrayals of modern liberated *rinds*. By granting himself the choice of either living or ending his life, Badi'i enters the realm of *rindī* where the man is an "individual" who could abandon the norms of his society to embrace his own choices. In this way, *Taste of Cherry* reminds us of the story of Adam/mankind, the choice he made in eating from the fruit of knowledge and his subsequent descent to Earth.

In his previous films, Kiarostami was always focusing on "ideas" rather than questions that concern "humankind". On the other hand, *Taste of Cherry* highlights the situation of modern human beings. This may explain why *Taste of Cherry*, of all Kiarostami's films, has the largest number of close-ups and wide shots. Once again, Kiarostami uses the road and his "windshield camera" which symbolize the journey of a man who is in search of the meaning of life. In his expeditions, Badi'i is more in search of life than death. As a result, I believe this film is more about life, it's happy and unhappy moments, and about people's metamorphoses in adopting new meanings for their lives.

In embracing poetical mysticism and the state of *rindī* or hedonism, Hafez became the everlasting poet of all times in Persia. In modern times, Kiarostami,

influenced by this philosophy of *rindī*, crosses ethnic, geographical, and political boundaries in order to touch the very essence of humanity.

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[1] I should mention that Ovanes Oganians, the Armenian immigrant who made the first feature film in Iran, did not draw on literary aesthetics in his filmmaking. His first feature, a semi-animation entitled *Abi va Rabi* ("*Abi and Rabi*" 1930), as well as his second film, *Haji Aqa Actor-e Sīnimā* ("*Haji Aqa, The Movie Star*"1932), used comedy to reach the audiences and guarantee lucrative returns.

[2] There are two points that needs to be explained here: First of all, both Irani and Sepanta made their first films in India with support from Dinshah, head of the Zoroastrian community in India. During the 1930s, Irani was running Imperial Film Studios in Bombay. Before becoming involved in filmmaking, Sepanta was invited to Bombay by Dinshah to do research on Persian texts (Mehrabi 27). The second point that should be clarified is Indians' familiarity with Persian literature. The interrelations between Sanskrit sacred Vedas and Persian texts such as Avesta date back to at least 3000 years ago. In the modern era, Persian was the literary and court language in the Mongol Empire in India. In 1834, the British government abolished Persian as the official language of India (Tavakoli-Targhi 106).

[3] Poets such as Aref Ghazvini, Malek-o Sho'ara Bahar, Iraj Mirza, and Ashraf-o din Gilani in this era employed poetry as a means of protesting the corrupt Qajar Dynasty.

[4] The term *filmfarsi* was originally coined by an Iranian film critic, Hooshang Kavousi, who was a harsh critic of this low-quality popular genre and a passionate admirer of alternative films such as Ebrahim Golestan's *Muj va Marjān va Khārā* (*Wave, Coral, and Granite* 1962).

[5] In a famous scene in *Gharoon's Treasure*, Fardin, who is seated on the carpet by a table-cloth, eats abgoosht, a traditional meat stew with onions, mostly for lower-class people. After this film was released, the expression *Film Abgūshtī* became a common term for low-quality Iranian films.

[6] Golestan's aesthetics, at this stage, is comparable to John Grierson's when the latter was supervising the making of documentaries for Britain's Empire Marketing Board (EMB) and General Post Office (GPO) (Evans 27-37). Like Grierson, who was committed to making socialist documentaries with high aesthetic standards, Golestan made a number of artistic films in a non-narrative fashion for the Ministry of Petroleum.

[7] This information is gathered from various sources: John Limbert's *Shiraz in the Age of Hafez*, http://www.hafizonlove.com/bio/index.htm , http://www.farhangsara.com/fhafez1.htm March 28, 2006, and *Reference Guide to World Literature* (436).

[8] *Qasīdih* is a poem of 15 lines or more in monorhyme, the main subject of which is something other than love. The first two hemistiches of this lyrical form rhyme, and then each line carries this rhyme to the end of the poem, so that it looks like *aa ba ca* and so forth. The subject of a *qasideh* can be praise, congratulations, invective, celebration, elegy, or religious or philosophical meditation. *Qasīdihs* were written from the very beginning of Islamic Persian poetry. Rudaki (d. ca. 940), the earliest poet from whom we have a substantial body of work, wrote *qasīdihs* in a fully developed form. Among other important poets who composed in the form of *qasīdeh* are Farrokhi Sistani (d. 1037/38), Manuchehri (d. 1040), Nasser Khosrow Qobadiyani (d. 1072/77), Anvari (d. 1189/90), and Khaqani (d.1199) (*The New Princeton Encyclopedia and Poetry and Poetics* 897).

[9] *Mathnavī* is a narrative form of poetry written in closed rhyming couplets. It is didactic in nature, mostly related to Sufi ideals. Sanaei's *Hadāiq al Haqīqih*, Attar's *Mantiq o- Tayr*, and Rumi's *Mathnavī Ma'navī* are examples of this narrative poetic form.

[10] *Himāsih* or epic poetry is best represented by Abol Qasem Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāmih*.

[11] *Manzumih*, roughly translated as romance poetry, was a poetic tradition before Islam and continued vigorously in the Islamic era. *Manzumih* was centered on the military and amorous adventures of royal characters. Fakhr'i din Gorgani's *Vīs va Rāmīn* (1054) and Nezami Ganjavi's (d. 1209) *Khamsih* (Quintet) are famous examples of this poetic form. Four out of five poems of *Khamsih* are romantic accounts of Arab lovers Layli and Majnūn, the Iranian royal couple Khusrow and Shirin, the monarch Bahram V, and Alexander of Macedonia.

[12] By indicating Hafez's poetry, I mean his lyrical poetry or his *Divan of Ghazals*, as it is commonly referred to in the Persian literary context.

[13] I have used Sharyar Sharyari's translation, quoted from: http://www.hafizonlove.com/divan/02/071.htm.

[14] Gyran is played by the prominent pre-revolutionary actress Minoo Abrishami.

[15] To some extent, Kiyārustami uses visual poetics in *Through the Olive Trees* by shooting the attractive scenery of northern Iran, depicted in his long shots of olive trees and rice paddies. Aside from this film, he is mostly involved with philosophical poetics.

[16] Music is only employed in two scenes of the film, both times when the boy is shown in a long shot ascending the hill to reach his friend's house.

[17] This definition recalls this verse by Hafez :

دل چو پرگار به هر سو دوراني مي كرد وندر آن دايره سرگشته ي پا بر جا بود

Which means: The heart was making circles like compasses
Wandering but stocking at the same place

[18] There are a few exceptions in this regard, one of which is pointed out by Baraheni. This *ghazal* starts with the following verse:

زلف آشفته و خوی کرده و خندان لب و مست پیرهن چاک و غزل خوان و صراحي درست

[19] Verse is the semantic unit in Persian ghazal. As a crucial element of Persian poetry, verse was ultimately modified in Hafez and Rumi's poetry. From a rhythmic point of view, however, the hemistich is the unit of ghazal. Each two hemistiches are united semantically and visually. The centrality of verse as a unit was a distinctive feature of the genre of ghazal, but it later developed in the Indian school of poetry's Shah Beiyts (or grand verses) in Iran.

[20] When you look at a segment of a poem, you recognize it as poetry visually from its form. Rhythm and meter, the verbal components of poetry, come afterward, when you read it. This poem by Rumi is a good example:

عف عف عف همي زند اشتر من ز تف تفي وع وع وع همي كند حاسدم از شلقلقي
وع وع وع چه گويدم طفلك مهد بسته را دق دق دق همي رسد گوش مرا زوق وقي
قو قو قوي بلبلان نعره زند همي مرا قم قم قم شب غمان تا بصبوح ساقي

This poem is quoted from Reza Baraheni's *Gold in Copper* (54). As Baraheni indicates, in this poem, there is a direct link between the form and the poet's emotional thought.

[21] It is noteworthy that on one hand, Kiyārustami shows up in quite a few occasions in his films (explicitly in *Close-up*, *Homework* and implicitly in *Through the Olive Trees*) to assert his authorial

power, while at the same time he criticizes his authorship and directorship in *Life and then Nothing* and *Wind Will Carry Us*.

[22] This is how Rumi raises the same concern:

ز کجا آمده ام آمدنم بهر چه بود به کجا می روم آخر ننمایی وطنم

[23] This is my translation.

[24]

شعر حادثه ای است که در زبان رخ می دهد

[25] This is taken from a report by Parviz Jahed on the BBC Website. The title is "Towards Omitting the Director from Cinema": http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/arts/story/2004/02/040203_la-pj-Kiyārustami.shtml

[26] My emphasis.

[27] Translated by N. J. Dawood.

28

به خلدم دعوت ای زاهد مفرما که این سیب زنخ زان بوستان به

Chapter Two:

Kiarostami and the Aesthetics of Modern Persian Poetry

The Philosophy of a Novel Outlook[1]

In his filmmaking, Abbas Kiarostami draws heavily on modern Persian poetry, just as he was influenced by classical Persian poetry. The impact of the poetry of Sohrab Sepehri and Forough Farrokhzad, among other contemporary poets, is evident in his film grammar. In the ensuing discussion, I will explore the relations between Kiarostami's filmmaking and contemporary Persian poetry.

As I discussed in chapter one, the fruition of Iranian art cinema in the 60s coincided with the most glorious moments of modern poetry inherited from Nima Yushij, the father of modern Persian poetry, and continued by poets such as Ahmad Shamlu, Manuchehr Atashi, Forough Farrokhzad, and Sohrab Sepehri. The idea of changing Persian poetry to accommodate new social and political phenomena, however, began earlier, in the late 19th century, with the "revivalist" sensibilities – in Mahmud Kianush's terms (14) – of poets such as Aref Ghazvini (1882-1933), Mirzadeh Eshghi (1893-1923), and Iraj Mirza (1874-1925). This also coincided with the critical years when the constitutional revolution was taking shape. These poets' contribution to Persian poetry was significant as their poetry stood against the traditionalist conceptions, which aimed at preserving the old Persian prosody along with relatively traditional concepts and beliefs. The revivalists' poetry with their political and patriotic topics brought a fresh atmosphere to Persian poetry but ultimately, it was Nima who changed the course of events by taking radical measures

to establish a new era in Persian poetry. His revolutionary ideas for changing Persian poetry applied to both form and subject matter. Nima freed poetic form and brought innovative concepts into poetry to reconcile it with the realities of Iranian society. Gradually, Persian poetry became a political weapon whose main goal was to convey social and political ideas instead of genuine personal emotions, which would fall into the universal realm of human feelings. This poetic expression of social and political concerns was the hallmark of poems written by Shamlu, Khosrow Golsorkhi, and Akhavan-Sales. Among the second generation of Nima's followers, Farrokhzad and Sepehri reconstructed Nima's legacy by turning Persian poetry into something more personal and peaceful. As Dabashi indicates, these two poets "cut through the thick politization of [their] age to grasp a primal moment of wonder in the world" (*Close Up* 43). Dabashi goes on to say:

> In the poetry of Forough Farrokhzad and Sohrab Sepehri, in particular, there was a transmutation of the historical person that Nima had made possible into an impatient realization of the self-transparency of one's presence in the world. The whole metaphysics of representation, from classic poetry down to its vestiges in the Nimaic revolution, Sepehri and Farrokhzad took gracefully to task by radically rejecting the aesthetic objectification of being. Their poetry is an active insurgency against that objectification in reaching for the immediate experience of the world *before* its mediated modulations. Theirs was an instrumental intrusion into the immediacy and facticity of that form of being wherein the world is de-

worlded, life is de-experienced, reality becomes no longer self evident, and the self-transparency of life is no longer inaccessible. (*Close Up* 44)

Sepehri's "de-experienced" reading of reality, as Sirus Shamisa puts it in *A Critique on Sohrab Sepehri's Poetry*, comes from his fresh look cleansed of "pre-judgments and inherited knowledge of the past" (*Sohrab Sepehri* 13). Sepehri's poetry is energized with an emanicipatory power and asks the reader to liberate the self from the conventional "known":

من نمی دانم
که چرا می گویند: اسب حیوان نجیبی است کبوتر
زیباست
و چرادر قفس هیچ کسی کرکس نیست
گل شبدر چه کم از لاله قرمز دارد
چشم ها را باید شست جور دیگر باید دید

I wonder
why they say that the horse is a noble beast, the pigeon
is delightful
and why nobody keeps a vulture in a cage.
Is the clover flower not as pleasing as tulips?
We should wash our eyes, we should see in a different
way.
(from "Seday-e Pay-e Ab", "The Sound of Water Steps" 291)

In a similar fashion, Farrokhzad's fresh look at the world poeticizes simple events of everyday life. In the introduction to *A Collection of Forough Farrokhzad's Poetry*, Farrokhzad points to the simplicity of her poetic language in an interview:

> There are endless possibilities in Persian language. In Persian, I *discovered*[2] the possibility of conveying a message in a simple language... as simple as I am talking to you now... If you ask me about what I have gained in terms of language and rhyme, I could say intimacy and simplicity. (qtd in *Forough Farrokhzad: A Critical Perspective* 255)

Her poetry talks intimately about her sewing machine and a window to the yard, as well as about her son, husband and lover, or the erotic moments of one's life. Her honest, simple, and intimate words visualized everyday life and de-familiarized Persian poetry persistently charged with ornamented vocabulary and complex conceptions:

کوچه ای هست که در آن جا
پسرانی که به من عاشق بودند هنوز
با همان موهای در هم و گردن های دراز و پاهای باریک
به تبسم های دخترکی می اندیشند
که یک شب او را
باد با خود برد
"تولدی دیگر"

There is an alley where
the boys who were once in love with me,
with the same uncombed hair, thin necks, and long legs

are still thinking of the innocent little girl who was carried
by the wind
("Another Birth" translated by Karim Emami qtd in Hillmann 112)

In the same poem, Farrokhzad aesthetisizes and visualizes the most ordinary moments of life, or in Hillmann's words, "images of everyday happenings that may collectively define life's essence." Hillmann goes on to say: "[h]er artist's eye and imagination capture vivid, everyday moments" (113-114):

زندگی شاید
یک خیابان درازست که هر روز زنی با زنبیلی از آن می گذرد
زندگی شاید طفلی است که از مدرسه بر می گردد
زندگی شاید افروختن سیگاری باشد در فاصله رخوتناک دو هم آغوشی
یا عبور رهگذری باشد
که کلاه از سر بر می دارد
و با یک لبخند بی معنی به یک رهگذر دیگر "صبح بخیر" می گوید

Life is perhaps
a long street through which a woman
holding a basket passes by every day.
[...] Life is perhaps a child returning home from school.
Life is perhaps lighting up a cigarette
in the languid interval

between two love-makings

or the absent gaze of a passerby

who takes off his hat to another passerby

with a meaningless smile and a good morning (translated by Karim Emami qtd in Hillmann 111)

In Kiarostami's films, Sepehri and Farrokhzad's intimate language has turned into a unique visual display in which the viewer feels him/herself detached from the past and the future in order to grasp the wonderful immediate moment. His camera represents a "fresh look like water flowing in each and every moment of the river," to borrow Shamisa's description of Sepehri's poetry (14). What makes Kiarostami's approach to reality different from that of other Iranian filmmakers, yet similar to Sepehri's and Farrokhzad's poetry, is the way he deconstructs our construction of reality. Kiarostami's camera functions as revealing fresh eyes clear and cleansed enough to grasp reality or what the audiences' eyes failed to see before.

It is noteworthy that Kiarostami's portrayal of reality relies on the "aesthetic reality," a non-manipulative approach to filmmaking, as opposed to "seamless reality" that naturalizes what it represents as reality.[3] Kiarostami's aesthetically motivated realism offers a reading, and in some cases several readings of reality and does not intend to suggest an absolute, unchanging, and unchangeable whole. Like Sepehri and Farrokhzad's poetry, Kiarostami's realist discourse subdues certain truths to depict the diversity of this notion. Kiarostami's realism produces a multiple reality. This multiplicity of possibilities liberates his films from having a fixed meaning by providing space to its spectators to draw their conclusions.

Kiarostami's aesthetic realism is achieved by his employment of depth of focus and long takes which rewardingly, as Meyhan Bahrami states, "give his films an Iranian aura in tune with Persian poetry with its lyrical nuance" (26). Kiarostami's cinema presents what André Bazin would call "a language the semantic and syntactical unit of which is in no sense the Shot; in which the image is evaluated not according to what it adds to reality [through montage and the plastic composition of the image] but what it reveals of it" (28). In *Through the Olive Trees*, for instance, the filmmaker visualizes the real story of a man and woman in a quake-struck area. He reveals an issue as simple as a love affair between a man and a woman in the midst of a catastrophic earthquake in northern Iran. The simplicity of this real event is created to a great extent by his use of depth of field and his long takes, in which he shows the whole scene in one take, in its physical entirety. The refusal to break up the action using a classical cut "ensures the continuity of dramatic space and, of course, of its duration" (Bazin 34) when the director intends to reveal reality.

The idea of this film arises when Kiarostami returns to the village of Koker, now struck by a devastating earthquake, to shoot another film called *Life and then Nothing*. Among the high school girls assembled by the crew, Ms. Shiva, the assistant director, chooses Tahereh to be cast as a young bride called Tahereh. As soon as the crew starts preparation to shoot the film, the director and his assistants realize the difficulties of the job. Tahereh refuses to wear the traditional costume in favor of an inappropriate party dress. The man who is chosen to play the young husband stutters in front of women and is unable to deliver his lines. Ms. Shiva has to bring in an unemployed mason called Hussein to play Tahereh's husband, Hussein. An equally

frustrating challenge to the crew is that now Tahereh refuses to talk to Hussein. The shooting is suspended so the crew can assess the situation. Hussein reveals to the crew that he had proposed to Tahereh but her family did not consent. He is looking for a sign that will show whether Tahereh is interested in him or not. The film continues to display both the actual events in Hussein and Tahereh's relationship, which at times take ironical turns.

Through the Olive Trees redefines the function of cinema as a narrative of real life when the two genres of documentary and narrative cinema are fused. The most sincere moments of life are shown in representing the everyday life of the residents of Koker and actual moments in the interaction between Hussein and Tahereh. The cinematic techniques Kiarostami employs in this film enhance the revelation of reality instead of adding to reality. The actual length – or at least what it looks like the actual length – of shooting time in the film corresponds to real life. The last sequence of the film, the most significant moment in my view, is a good example of this technique. In a long, static take with deep focus, Hussein is shown following Tahereh, apparently proposing to her once again. The camera pans down the hill through the olive trees and an open field, after the fictional crew is finished with shooting the film. Now the couple is depicted in its real off-camera lives. They fade into white dots disappearing in the green landscape. As they move farther from the camera, the audience no longer hears Hussein's pleading. After a fairly long silence the audience is given the privilege of perceiving the soundtrack once again, but disappointingly it is not Tahereh and Hussein's conversation. Instead, it is a peaceful piece of classical music, *Concerto for Oboe and Strings*, by Domenico Cimarosa. This extremely static long take with deep

focus continues as we see Hussein running towards the camera once again. Does he bear good news? The audience can only assume so. Here, it is the depth of focus that gives a more realistic, less theatrical image of life with its complex message. This last shot is a reflection of the actual passage of time and makes the whole movie seem to be merely one long episode in which the viewer is suspended between film fiction and reality. The deep focus which shows reality as a whole, especially in the absence of a soundtrack, proposes a unique cinematic language that is very close to the poetic language of Sepehri and Farrokhzad, offering ultimate liberation from the constructed meaning imposed through traditional montage images which break the action into cuts. Kiarostami's refusal of the classical cutting gives the audience of *Through the Olive Trees* maximum freedom to conclude the film in either way. The fact that this episode is presented in its physical entirety makes it ambiguous, if not undecidable. In the last sequence, the audience is not to see the actors in close-up shots that would present their facial expressions accompanied by their voices. The choice of deep focus, which brings uncertainty, is especially important in suggesting that Hussein and Tahereh are shown in real, off-camera moments—although this is merely a deceptive twist in the film which is in any case a *film* or a fictive imitation of reality. This could suggest that people's real personalities are much more complex and intriguing than the characters they play in front of a camera.

With Kiarostami's camera, the audience goes beyond the devastations caused by the earthquake to witness a celebration of life and love. In *Life and then Nothing*, Kiarostami's lens is focused on children who are talking about World Cup Soccer, in the midst of their loss. *Where Is the Friend's House?* visualizes the world through a

child's eyes to capture moments of life that adults fail to take in. Kiarostami's camera is the artificial/artful eye that sees more accurately than real eyes, as if to show the failure of the artificial/real binary. Focusing his camera on the object/nature of reality, Kiarostami problematizes the subject/audience and established prejudgments. This is reminiscent of a part of Sohrab's "The Sound of Water Steps" that reads:

چشم ها را باید شست

جور دیگر باید دید

واژ ها را باید شست

واژه باید خود باد واژه باید خود باران باشد

The eyes should get cleansed, we should see in a different way

Words should be washed

Words should be the same as wind, words should be the same as rain (292)

As Shamisa indicates in *Sohrab Sepehri from A Critical Perspective*, Sepehri proposes the "philosophy of novel outlook" (11) in which the thinker frees herself from "the known" to grasp the wonderful moment here and now. This wonderful novel outlook is translated into a poetic cinematic language by Abbas Kiarostami in films such as *Through the Olive Trees*.

The Art which Is Universal

Neither Farrokhzad nor Sepehri was shying away from creating a form of art inspired by his sincere internal feelings. Farrokhzad, especially, made an example of breaking the expectations in a patriarchal society that female artists should conceal their sexual desires and instead give priority to social issues. A good example of a poet who fulfilled the expectations of the patriarchal society was Parvin E'tesami

(1907-1941). She was the most famous Iranian poetess before Farrokhzad and is still considered "the accepted" female poet – among modern counterparts such as Sepideh Kashani--according to the traditionalists. Unlike Farrokhzad's, E'tesami's poetry is traditional in form and diction and is didactic in nature. The poetic self is neglected in her poems in favor of a social critique. In contrast, Farrokhzad's poetry is bold and controversial, with an unmistakably feminine perspective. As a rebellious woman in a Muslim country in the 50s and 60s, Farrokhzad trained her poetry on her true feelings, love, and sexual emotions, which as both Michael Hillmann and Farzaneh Milani point out, remain a central theme in her poems to the end.[4] Of all her poems, "Gunah" ("Sin") is one that is quoted most often, and that has raised much discussion:

گنه کردم گناهی پر ز لذت
در آغوشی که گرم و آتشین بود
گنه کردم میان بازوانی
که داغ و کینه جوی و آتشین بود

در آن خلوت گه تاریک و خاموش
گه کردم به چشم پر ز رازش
دلم در سینه بی تابانه لرزید
ز خواهش های چشم پر نیازش

در آن خلوت گه تاریک و خاموش
نشستم در کنار او پریشان

لبش بر روی لبهایم هوس ریخت

ز اندوه دل دیوانه رستم

I sinned a sin full of pleasure,

in an embrace which was warm and fiery.

I sinned surrounded by arms

that were hot and avenging and iron.

In that dark and silent seclusion,

I looked into his secret-full eyes.

My heart impatiently shook in my breast

in response to the request of his needful eyes

In that dark and silent seclusion,

I sat disheveled at his side.

His lips poured passion on my lips,

I escaped from the sorrow of my crazed heart.[5]

Farrokhzad's life and poetry showed that she did not abide by the norms of her society or poetic conventions.[6] She remained a controversial figure until the end of her life. Milani, in her article entitled "Forough Farrokhzad," investigates the feminine considerations in Farrokhzad's poetry:

> Describing her emotions and the experiences of both her body and her mind—avoiding semantic obliquity, obtrusive stylistic devices, and

> traditional artifices of concealment—, [Farrokhzad] explores patterns of heterosexual relationships in an unprecedented manner. No other Persian woman has offered more detailed and candid description of such relationships, or a more individualized, less restrained portrayal of men. The substitution of abstractions for individuals or the subordination of characters to types—a literary tradition practiced too often—has no appeal for this poet. Even the criterion of objectivity and its techniques are repeatedly abrogated. (370)

Milani asserts in another article[7] that the personal and sincere feminine voice of Farrokhzad "seldom leaves the Iranian reader impartial. It evokes either strong attraction or keen aversion" ("Paradise Regained" 91). Especially in the mid 1950s, when the poet gained national, and to some degree international fame, the unsympathetic reaction to her poetry was frequently seen in Persian journals and newspapers. One such example that Hillmann recalls was written by Sirus Parham, under the pseudonym of "Doktor Mirta":

> Ms. Farrokhzad has implicitly considered the right of 'sexual freedom' the most vital and essential right that a woman should seek from society. Consequently, she has endeavored to incite women against men, assuming that the 'massacre' of men will do away all of women's social deprivations and thus women will be completely free! (84)

Farrokhzad's internal poetic gaze along with her sincere feminine descriptions were controversial and offending her patriarchal society but, in any event, they made her a poet with universal human concerns. Setting aside the thick political atmosphere

of the Tehran literati, she found sophistication in everyday life that she transformed into a simple poetic language, precise and clear. Thus, she crossed cultural and political thresholds to enter the realm of ontological human concerns. Similarly, Kiarostami's abandoning of immediate political issues and social problems made him a groundbreaking filmmaker inside and outside his country. His questions do not confine themselves to local issues; instead, they are set on the screen to broaden the audience's mind by asking more questions about existence as a universal concern. Hence, his seemingly naïve and de-politicized approach to reality has been criticized or at least closely watched by both Iranian and international critical circles.

At a time when Iran was experiencing a violent time under an Islamic government with more political prisoners and executions than at any other period in its history, and was struggling with a war in which millions of lives were lost, Kiarostami trained his camera on simple issues such as the subject of homework in Iranian schools in *Homework* or a young boy who is determined to find his friend's house to return his notebook in *Where Is the Friend's House?*. This was and still is an issue for which Kiarostami has been seriously criticized by a few Iranian film critics. In "Documentary Approaches in Kiarostami's Films," Mohammad Saeed Mohassesi provides an example of such harsh viewpoints, but the author and source are not mentioned:

> In the midst of a devastating outbreak, which claimed tens of thousands of lives, Kiarostami is more interested in the results of the World Cup Soccer, or finding two young kids among thousands of missing children [in *Life and then Nothing*]. Another such example is [found in *Through the Olive*

> *Trees* which is] the persistent and, to some extent, annoying proposal of a young man to a young girl who ironically lost her family [in the earthquake]. (75)

As Mohassesi asserts, Kiarostami's approach is similar to Sepehri's, who was thinking of "getting a whiff of a flower in another planet" (75), while according to his critics, others had already found their way to outer space. Kiarostami's tendency to look at the world in a simple fashion could explain why in many instances he has chosen to show his point through a child's eye, which is free from grownups' concerns.[8] In *Where Is the Friend's House?* it is through the eyes of Babak that the audience sees adults' unsympathetic reactions to his problem. More significantly, in *Wind Will Carry Us*, it is through Farzad, the young rural boy who becomes the guide to the film crew, that the engineer learns to appreciate both life and death. It is through Farzad's novel viewpoint that the engineer understands not to wait for death but to celebrate life because as Farrokhzad says, "the Wind Will Carry Us away" at any moment. Like Sepehri, Kiarostami is an artist who is seeking the truth beyond the tumult of wars and revolutions. His approach is reminiscent of these lines from Sepehri's "The Sound of Water's Footsteps":

کار ما شاید این است
که میان گل نیلوفر و قرن
پی آواز حقیقت بدویم

our job may be
to follow the song of truth
between the lotus and the century (298-99)

Because as he says in "To the Garden of Fellow-Travelers" :

من از سطح سیمانی قرن می ترسم

... مرا باز کن مثل یک در به روی هبوط گلابی در این عصر معراج پولاد

مرا خواب کن زیر یک شاخه دور از شب اصطکاک فلزات

I'm afraid of the cement layer of the century

... open me like a door to the descent of the pear in this time of ascending the steel

Put me to sleep under a tree branch far from the night of the metals' friction. (396)

Since Kiarostami's films were banned in Iran after he made *Wind Will Carry Us*, and are mainly shown to Western audiences, he is now accused of being under Western cinematic influence and, according to his critics, this is how he finds his way into Western theaters. Many people in Iran think that his journalistic method of filmmaking does not deserve international attention and that he is a favorite of international festivals merely because he portrays Iran as a poverty-stricken country by showing the poor as opposed to the majority of the urban population. Kiarostami himself brought up this issue in an interview with Puriya Mahrouyan in London on April 19, 2005.[9] In chapter five I argue that, contrary to what these analysts assume, Kiarostami is more likely influenced by Eastern cinema, and more specifically by Japanese cinema.

From the international perspective, the paradox of Kiarostami's film style stems from the recent political changes that brought anti-Western attitudes. As Rosenbaum pinpoints:

> While Iranians continue to be among the most demonized people on the planet (along with their neighbors to the west, the Iraqis), Iranian cinema is becoming almost universally recognized by critics as among the most ethical and humanist. (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 2)

Needless to say, Kiarostami's humanist approach in films that are widely known to Western audiences had a major part in creating this impression.

From *The House Is Black* to Black Valley in *Wind Will Carry Us*

As I indicated, Kiarostami's poetic realist approach to filmmaking is undeniably inherited from Iranian New Wave filmmakers such as Daryush Mehrjuei and Sohrab Shahid Sales, whose *Yik Ittifāq'i Sādih (A Simple Event,* 1973*)* Kiarostami has mentioned as a major influence (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 2). As Dabashi asserts, what was crucially at stake in this film was its "deceptive simplicity" which "began patiently to probe the nature of reality beyond its metaphysically mediated signification" (*Close Up* 47) in portraying the life of a boy in northern Iran. However, a lesser-known film, but the "greatest of all Iranian films" according to Rosenbaum (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 2), entitled *The House Is Black* and made by Farrokhzad in 1962, shows profound affinities with Kiarostami's movies made almost thirty years later. It is hard to say to what extent Farrokhzad's film has had a direct impact on Kiarostami's film grammar, or at what point in his career he became acquainted with Farrokhzad's *The House Is Black.* What is more clear, however, is that, as the filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf pointed out, this documentary made by a poet is "the best Iranian film [to have] affected the contemporary Iranian cinema" (qtd in Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 2), to which Kiarostami's cinema belongs. Not only did

Farrokhzad inspire Kiarostami through her poetry, then, but she also became a source of inspiration to Iranian cinema, and consequently to Kiarostami, through her filmmaking.

The House Is Black[10] is a poetic documentary about a leper colony near Tabriz, the capital of Eastern Azerbaijan in Iran. It won a prize for best documentary at the Oberhausen Film Festival in the winter of 1964. As Amin Banani indicates, "four years later the same honor was to be named 'Forough Farrokhzad Memorial Prize" (Kessler and Banani 6). It was also screened at the Pesaro Film Festival in 1966.[11] Farrokhzad's *The House Is Black* was one of the first examples of tailoring literature and poetry into cinema, with Farrokhzad's voice reciting her own poems in the film. This fusion of literature into cinema, which had existed in Iranian cinema since its very first days, became the hallmark of the Iranian New Wave films. One might recall Mehrjuie's *Cow* and Bahman Farmanara's *Prince Ehtejab* as other excellent examples of the linkage of Iranian cinema with literature. It is no surprise, then, to see Kiarostami's deep reliance on Persian poetry, to the point where he took the titles of two of his most acclaimed movies, *Where Is the Friend's House* and *Bād Mā rā bā Khud Khāhad Burd (Wind Will Carry Us*, 1999) from two poems by Sepehri and Farrokhzad respectively.

As a classical Iranian film this "versified story/film," in Houshang Golmakani's interpretation,[12] is crucial in two ways. First of all, it is the particular secular and realist gaze at a social issue, translated into a symbolical film grammar. As Ebrahim Golesten, the producer of the film, indicated, "*The House Is Black* depicts a leprous society in which the people trust in God and seek a cure for their condition

through prayer, whereas only science and surgery can effect a cure" (qtd in Hillmann 43- 44).[13] This secular poetic gaze would later be transferred into Kiarostami's film grammar, widely seen as a symbolically charged language. Secondly, and more significantly, was Farrokhzad's profound humanist approach in this film, which is similar to Kiarostami's viewpoint. Rosenbaum points out that "Farrokhzad's uncanny capacity to regard lepers without morbidity as both beautiful and ordinary, objects of love as well as intense identification, offers very different challenges, pointing to very different spiritual and philosophical assumption" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 4). In this documentary masterpiece, Farrokhzad uses nonprofessionals in their real situation -- which is reminiscent of Kiarostami's stylistics. The contemporary filmmaker Nasser Saffarian indicated that *The House Is Black* was not made according to a prepared scenario. Most of the film was formed and became a meaningful whole when Farrokhzad finished its editing.[14] However, to some extent, *The House Is Black* is staged and in very rare cases it might be scripted. An example of the scripted parts could be the closing scene in which the lepers come towards the camera and close the door that has a sign reading "The Lepers' House." Hence, while the blend of fact and fiction in Farrokhzad's case established the cinema vérité approach in Iranian cinema, Kiarostami mastered it.

Farrokhzad's spiritual yet secular gaze at a community of lepers depicts the victims' pleasures more than their sufferings. In a similar fashion, the subject of most of Kiarostami's movies is the condition of poor people as investigated through the eyes of a middle-class director. As Rosenbaum observes:

> The most obvious parallel to *The House Is Black* in Kiarostami's career is his documentary *A.B.C. Africa* (2001) about orphans of AIDS victims in Uganda. This film goes beyond even Farrokhzad's works in emphasizing the everyday joy of children at play in the midst of their apparent devastation. (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 5)

However, *A.B.C. Africa* is not the only example for that matter. As mentioned earlier, in *Through the Olive Trees* and *And Life Goes On* we implicitly witness a similar emphasis on the joys of everyday life over the sufferings caused by a natural disaster.

Throughout *The House Is Black*, the audience is exposed to the two different voices of Golestan and Farrokhzad. The former gives a dispassionate account of medical information about the disease, while the patients are shown getting treatments in a clinic. It offers an external look at the lepers' condition by presenting statistical and scientific data.[15] This could clarify why the film was premiered to professional audiences in the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Tehran University, with the former queen, Farah Pahlavi and the shah's sister, Ashraf Pahlavi, as guests of honor. Right after this factual account, Farrokhzad's mesmerizing sound recites from *The Old Testament* (as Golestan indicated in Jahed 25), in a beautiful tone, to "soften the effect of the harsh images"[16] of deformed bodies and the unsympathetic scientific information. Now, the lepers are shown in their daily activities: going to school, walking in the residence yard, dancing, and having a party. The rest of the film brings an internal look by providing ordinary images of the lepers' lives. In the first sequence, the audience sees a close up of a man's feet dancing along with a humming voice. The camera slowly pans up to show two deformed dancing hands and a

wrecked face full of joy, singing. Among other scenes we witness the children's school, two residents playing checkers, a wedding ceremony with lepers dancing and playing instruments, and a few shots showing the lepers' prayers in their mosque. One of the most moving scenes presents a close-up of a woman's face, wrecked and deformed by leprosy, as she applies make up to her eyes. Farrokhzad successfully evades a journalistic/reporting style of documentary making by viewing the material through her poetic gaze. She deconstructs our pre-judgments about notions such as normal/abnormal and beautiful/ugly by showing the leper community just like any other group of people engaged in everyday life.

The masterful fusion of fact and fiction, represented by "the dual narrative mode," as Kaveh Golestan has indicated in "*The House Is Black*" *Commentary*. It reinforces a detachment value comparable to the distance effects in Kiarostami's films. Rosenbaum has also confirmed this matter:

> This poetic mixture [of actuality and fiction in Farrokhzad's *The House Is Black*] is also found throughout Kiarostami's work over a span of more than three decades, and it raises comparable issues about the director's manipulation of and control over his cast members. Yet the films of both Farrokhzad and Kiarostami propose inquiries into the ethics of middle-class artists filming poor people: they are not simply or exclusively demonstrations of this practice. In Kiarostami's case, the films are often critiques of the filmmaker's distance and detachment from his subjects as well as his special entitlements, as seen in his work since early 1980s (both *Orderly and disorderly* [1981] and *Fellow Citizen* [1983], for instance,

> feature his off screen voice). In Farrokhzad's case, in which the sense of personal commitment runs even deeper, the implications of an artist being unworthy of her subject are never entirely absent. (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 5)

Likewise, the ironical approach of both of these directors towards their subject matter results in a similar detachment effect. In the lepers' elementary school, the teacher asks one of his students to name a few beautiful objects, to which he answers: "the Moon, the Sun, flowers, and playing." Then he asks another student to name a few ugly objects. The student replies: "hands, feet, head." The class bursts into laughter. As a viewer of the film, I found this response bitterly humorous, too. It is humorous because these human body parts are not usually seen as ugly, but it also suggests a sad point, since a leper's hands, feet and head could turn ugly when the disease spreads. In any case, this ironical gaze directed at a serious disease such as leprosy brings about a refreshing attitude that prevents the audience from being overwhelmed by sorrow. Farrokhzad's humorous look at her subjects is reminiscent of Kiarostami's witty approach in almost all of his films including *Homework*, whose subject matter is children and their homework. In *Homework*, when the audience is worn out by the rather similar responses of children all pointing to the priority of their homework over TV (although all of them are asked to come to the principal's office because they have failed to do their homework), one boy's response offers the same refreshing energy to the film. Basically, the boy blames his playful young sister for his failure to complete his homework by narrating amusing stories about himself and his sister. When

Kiarostami asks him how his mother punishes him when he does not do his assigned homework, he replies:

> BOY. My mother only tells me to do my homework as soon as I can. She never beats me with a belt.
>
> KIAROSTAMI. Then how do you know about punishing with a belt?
>
> BOY. Well, my father has got a few belts, but since he has a big belly, he can't use them. People call him Mr. Chubby [giggling]. He is not able to use them so my mother uses them for beating me. But each time she wants to beat me, she can't find them.

This conversation is made even more humorous by the reverse shots of the boy's face, with a big smile and a naughty look. Through Kiarostami's ironical gaze at a child's suffering, the boy "moves beyond everyday pains to attain the beauty bestowed in human's spirit" (Jahanbegloo 21). In this way, it is not the issue of homework, or even the Iranian school system which matters; what is at stake here, in Ramin Jahanbegloo's words, "is not the society but existence as a whole" (21).

This ironic gaze at subjects is mastered in Kiarostami's *Wind Will Carry Us*, which takes its title from Farrokhzad's poem. Like *The House Is Black, Wind Will Carry Us* depicts the bright side of human life despite Farrokhzad's title, suggesting a pessimistic emphasis on the dark side of life, and Kiarostami's choice of location in a remote village in Iranian Kurdestan called Siyah Darrih (Black Valley), connoting misery and unhappiness in its Persian background, which associates the color black

with a state of grieving and/or melancholy. In *Wind Will Carry Us*, the audience is engaged with a death-awaiting film crew who have traveled to Black Valley to film the funeral of a dying old woman called Malik Khanūm.

In *Wind Will Carry Us* the concept of binaries, which suggests a fixed-reality scheme through which we perceive the world, is problematized. It is ironically through the philosophical answers of Farzad – the kid who acts as the leader of the film crew in the village – that Kiarostami deliberately thwarts the audience's expectation of a clear-cut answer. In Farzad's world there is always more than one answer/possibility to a single question. When the filmmaker – ironically called engineer[17] – asks Farzad the direction to the village, he answers: "you can take this way, or that way or the other to get to the village." In another instance the filmmaker inquires about grandmother's age. Farzad replies: "She is 100-150." Similarly, when he asks him about the old woman's health—as they are waiting for her death to shoot the funeral ceremony — Farzad says it is "both good and bad." Farzad's "young" uncle is eighty years old and he calls him young uncle because he has two older uncles as well.

In problematizing a "black and white" worldview, Kiarostami interrogates the spectators' treatment of concepts such as truth and reality. He suggests the "art of thinking differently" inherited from the modern poetry tradition with its questioning and novel worldview. In *Wind Will Carry Us*, the paradoxical answers of a child cast doubt on the concept of binaries rooted in the adults' body of percepts. In this fashion, the spectator moves beyond the diegetic structure of the film to view a dynamic interpretation of truth, existence, thought, power and culture. Thus, truth is not treated

as an absolute and well-structured entity but as a textual and contextual commodity. Generally speaking, we tend to make sense of linguistic patterns by relating them to binaries. Farzad's responses defamiliarize the engineer's conventional shaping of meaning, and through him our own. While his responses make us laugh, they suggest that it is impossible to make a clear distinction between concepts such as "good" and "bad." Through Farzad's ironic answers, Kiarostami undermines the concept of binaries. Here, to borrow Nail Lucy's illuminating terms, the "fascist" and "foundationalist" approach to reality that legitimizes the "all-or nothingness of the opposition" fades away to create the feasibility of having an "assemblage of the oppositions" (235-37). Thus, in this film, the concepts of reality and truth are not treated as the "essence" but as the assemblage of contextual prospects.

More than in any other Kiarostami movie, in *Wind Will Carry Us* the director uses irony to entertain contradictory possibilities. His ironization of style, as a different aesthetic mode, recalls Allan Wilde's comment in his introduction to *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination*, where he declares that irony is "a mode of consciousness, a perceptual response to a world without unity or cohesion" (2). This idea is purposely reinforced by Kiarostami's choice of location. Kiarostami admitted that he had spent two years looking for the place for his shooting. In an interview with Jonathan Rosenbaum that was conducted in 2000, Kiarostami says:

> I was looking for a village with a strange architectural design -- something that would seem strange to the viewer as well as to us, suggesting a strangeness that would be brought out by the local funeral ceremony.

> When I found this village, it was so remote that when we went back to the place to begin shooting, we had some trouble finding it. (qtd. in Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 112)

Siyah Darrih (Black Valley), with its white exteriors and strange architecture that opens multiple routes to reach any particular destination, is an allegorical suggestion to the audience and Behzad that they live in a world which lacks any order or coherence or, finally, well established meaning. It is a reminder that there is no objective meaning to this world, and that so-called objectivity merely comes from our subjective perception of reality. However, Kiarostami's outlook does not fall into a pessimistic perception of the world. During his time there, Behzad learns not only how to recognize, but also how to appreciate and accept variety and confusion among other things. Thus we find a kind of "order," not "orderliness" (in Robert Venturi's terms) in the incoherent world presented to us (qtd. in Wilde 27). As Wilde mentions in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Venturi asks a remarkable question – similar to what Kiarostami encourages us to see – when he says: " [s]hould we not resist bemoaning confusion? Should we not look for meaning in the complexities and contradictions of our times and acknowledge the limitations of system? … When circumstances defy order, order should bend or break: anomalies and uncertainties give validity to architecture" (27). From the anomalies and uncertainties in the architecture of the village, Kiarostami steps forward to portray the indeterminacy Behzad confronts in awaiting death when he is surrounded by wonderful manifestations of life that are represented through such examples as a long take of a turtle, ironically stepping on a grave stone. When it is turned upside down by "the

engineer," it manages to get back to its normal position and continues its way. Another example of life and livelihood in the village, despite Behzad's wish to see a funeral, is the birth of a new baby in the house where the film crew is staying. There are other instances, ironically portraying virtual manifestations of life, including an unforgettable vibrant extreme long shot of a field showing three playful dogs.

Kiarostami does not train his ironical gaze by merely exercising controlled and witty verbal strategies through Farzad's speeches or shooting his film in an architecturally complex location. His paradoxical perspective is further intensified by a familiar *mise-en-scène*-oriented metaphor that he has exploited in many other films: a car driving down a twisting road. Once again, the visual and spatial nature of *mise-en-scène* at the beginning of the film implies a Sufi (to the Iranian audience) or a transcendental (to the international audience) journey in search of the truth. This idea is strengthened when we hear the film crew, who are looking for the village, recite a part of Sepehri's poem "Address": "a few steps to the tree, there is a garden greener than God's dreams."[18] This can suggest a clear reference to Sepehri's poetry and his own previous movies, such as *Where Is the Friend's House?* Conversely, this mystical journey turns out to be that of a Tehrani film crew traveling, with obvious colonial sensibilities, to shoot an exotic funeral in a remote village. They pretend to be in search of a lost treasure – in order to not hurt the villagers' feelings – and in one instance, Behzad claims to be in charge of a telecommunications project, and thus legitimizes the title given to him. Hence, the presence of these Tehrani people is not legitimized. On the other hand, the audience starts to question Behzad's exercise of power over the villagers, including Farzad, the well digger, and his fiancé. The

unequal relationship between (ironically) the guide/Farzad and the follower/engineer is particularly traumatized when Farzad brings some bread for the film crew before going to school. Behzad, annoyed and frustrated by his colleagues' intolerance, yells at Farzad, shown in a low angle shot to emphasize his inferiority and his helpless situation. Behzad, who comes to know the well digger in the cemetery where he frequently travels to get a cell phone signal, introduces himself to his fiancé as Yousef's boss. The audience is also disgusted by Behzad's voyeuristic treatment of the well digger's fiancée when he asks her to bring the lamp near her face in the dark cavern so that he can see Yousef's taste. All of the examples mentioned above show how Kiarostami's reflexive and regressive approach ironizes the established symbolic figures of road and traveler.

Wind Will Carry Us turns out to be not an innocent mystical journey but a self-critical account, because after all these middle-class people are involved in making a film in a poor village, just like Kiarostami himself who travels to remote places to make his films. It is a reflexive and self-mirroring movie that employs irony to question the moral validity of the film crew's presence in Siyah Darrih. Kiarostami's transcendental use of irony and reflexivity recalls a passage by F. W. Schlegel, where he identifies elegy as the median form of transcendental poetry:

> It begins as satire in the absolute difference of ideal and real, hovers in between as elegy, and ends as idyll with the absolute identity of the two ... This sort of poetry should unite the transcendental raw material and preliminaries of a theory of poetic creativity – often met with in modern poets – with the artistic reflection and beautiful self-mirroring that is

> present in Pindar, in the lyric fragments of the Greeks, in the classic elegy, and among the moderns, in Goethe. In all its descriptions, this poetry should describe itself, and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry. (excerpts from 'Anthnäum Fragments' qtd in Roberts 144)

Kiarostami's reflexive mode is aptly described by Schlegel's phrase, "simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry." While Kiarostami's poetic film aesthetically engages with a number of issues including the questions of life and death, it maintains a "cinema of cinema," to adapt Schlegel's term, which lodges a reflexive and self-criticizing awareness of its own cinematic nature with its power for constructing meaning through cinematic techniques.

Wind Will Carry Us espouses an ironical and self-questioning mode in portraying Behzad who travels from epistemological assurance to an undecidable position when he is troubled by philosophical dilemmas that Farzad introduces to him. In terms of the well digger's fiancée, the movie, despite what a few critics including Rosenbaum assume, does not accommodate a harassing or voyeuristic approach. On the contrary, it represents a reflexive irony for a sustained critique of voyeurism. Thus, *Wind Will Carry Us* functions as an initial act towards criticizing the filmmaker which will result in an attempt to eliminate the director in his later films. While Kiarostami's physical/figurative presence is evident in many of his films including *Close Up*, *Homework*, and *Life and Nothing More*, the presence of the filmmaker in *Wind Will Carry Us* interrogates the legitimacy of Kiarostami as a director.

In any event, the presence and the deliberate elimination of the director in Kiarostami's films announce the very presence of an auteur who wishes to criticize or eliminate himself. This shows another striking resemblance to the poetry of Sepehri and Farrokhzad. Unlike other poets of the Modern Poetry tradition, they do not disembody the poet. In Sepehri's poetry the poetical self talks about his love and passion for a woman, his parents, and town, while Farrokhzad's poetic persona aestheticizes the ordinary incidents of her life, including her husband, her son, Kamyar, and her lover, along with her sewing machine and garden. The following poems are two examples among many others taken respectively from the beginning of Sepehri's "The Sound of Water Footsteps" dedicated to his mother's silent nights, and from Farrokhzad's "Return."

اهل کاشانم

روزگارم بد نیست

تکه نانی دارم، خرده هوشی ، سر سوزن ذوقی

مادری دارم بهتر از برگ درخت

دوستانی بهتر از آب روان

I'm from Kashan

Life treats me well enough

I have enough to eat, a bit of intelligence, and a puny amount of talent

I have a mother, better than a tree's leaf

And some friends more refreshing than running water. (271-72)

The rest of this long poem deals with Sepehri's principles in life, his father and a poetic account of his death, and his memories of his sister's birth. As Shamisa

indicates, Sepehri's intention in versifying this autobiographical poem after his father's passing away was offering a poetic consolation to his mother (Shamisa, *Sohrab Sepehri* 45). The next poem is taken from a letter that was written in a reconciling mood[19] by Farrokhzad to her husband. This poem is entitled "Return":

تا نیمه شب به یاد تو چشمم نخفته است
ای مایه امید من ، ای تکیه گاه دور
هرگز مرنج از آن چه به شعرم نهفته است
...
این شعرها که روح تو را رنج داده است
فریاد های یک دل محنت کشیده است
...
پای مرا دوباره به زنجیرها ببند
تا فتنه و فریب ز پایم نیفکند
تا دست آهنین هوس های رنگ رنگ
بندی دوباره به پایم نیفکند
...

Because of that letter you sent and those bitter complaints
I couldn't close my eyes last night
O essence of hope and my distant refuge
never suffer for what is hidden in my verse

What has this poetry given to me but my beloved's
suffering
...
These verses that have tormented your soul
are the cries of a tortured heart
...
Once again, bind my legs to the chains
so that deceit and treachery do not defeat me
so that the stealthy hand of colorful passions
does not bind me again with another band (qtd. in
Shapur 269-71)

Kiarostami's self-critical approach, while it questions the power of media and of the director for that matter, brings the director, like the poet in the above instances, to the center of the film. It is an ironical presence that is reminiscent of the postmodern sublime identified by Andrew Michael Roberts as a "playful, self conscious, double coding and strategic anachronism" (154). Farrokhzad's ironical, and at times apologetic presence in her poems creates what Roberts calls a modern sublime that shows a "nostalgia for the missing contents" (151) such as a lost son (in "A Poem for Kami") or an unattainable lover (in "Another Birth"). Hence, this nostalgia for a loss becomes a postmodern sublime in Kiarostami's case that "creates new forms in order to impart a stronger sense of unpresentable" (152) through his critique of his own ideological position in the process of filmmaking.

Consequently, *Wind Will Carry Us* dismantles the illusion of "absolute objectivity" through its ironical aesthetization, which deconstructs the audience's presumption of the "absolute good" or the "right path" constructed by the "historically conditioned frames of meaning and perception" as Terry Eagleton indicates (61). I am convinced that Kiarostami along with other contemporary directors such as Makhmalbaf in *Nubat'i Ashighī* (Time of Love 1991) has opened the door to the philosophy of relativism in Iranian cinema. Through an ironized style, in *Wind Will Carry Us* Kiarostami successfully manages to diminish binary concepts such as old and young, good and bad, black and white in favor of portraying a more realistic world with relativist values. After watching this film, the viewer feels freed from the absolute structured meanings imposed by culture or language. She or he is given a chance to rethink established norms and values to re-contextualize and re-signify meaning.

The last ironical instance, proposed through Kiarostami's poetic and philosophical humor, is his deconstruction of the notion of leader in Iranian culture influenced by mysticism. A leader, or what is called in Persian culture *Pīr* is supposed to be an older person, as the Persian word literally suggests. In this film, however, it is a child who is guiding the film crew. In fact, Farzad is the one who makes us, and perhaps the filmmaker, re-view our/his prejudices. His action and speech underline the prejudices that govern our day-to-day evaluative practice. Is there any way to get rid of them the way Behzad did by symbolically throwing a human bone – representing the old values of a dead world – into running water – alive, active, and ready to embrace the future. His intention was to shoot a funeral. Ironically, after the old

woman's death he did not film the ceremony. Instead, he succeeds in demolishing the old "epistemological" paradigms enfolded in his old habits and beliefs. As mentioned earlier, Behzad is a not-so-likeable and manipulative person[20] who is trying to legitimize and justify his presence in the village. Through a child's lead and his encounter with the village doctor who makes him re-examine life, he ultimately moves on to shift his beliefs and celebrate life instead of waiting for a death. One of the most beautiful moments in *Wind Will Carry Us* is a long shot of a wheat field with rippling golden crops through which the doctor, accompanied by the filmmaker, is riding his scooter in a twisting road. In response to his comment that the other world is a better place than this one, the doctor recites this robaei of Khayyam:

گویند کسان بهشت باحور خوش است
من میگویم که آب انگور خوش است
این نقد بگیر و دست از آن نسیه بدار
کاواز دهل شنیدن از دور خوش است

They promise the *houries* (beautiful women) in heaven
But I would say wine is better
Take the present to the promises
A drum sounds melodious from apart

Once more, Kiarostami deconstructs our perception of a leader by portraying Farzad as the leader of the crew. From this perspective, *Wind Will Carry Us* is a dialogical response to both *Where Is the Friend's House?* and Sepehri's poem *Nishāni (Address)*. In the earlier film, it is the old man with his profound philosophical view who takes the lead to show the way to the child. Nevertheless, he is not successful in

doing so, gets tired in the middle of his way, and lets Ahmad continue in the dark. In the latter film, it is the child who acts as the leader and, surprisingly, accomplishes the job. He not only gives directions to the filmmaker, but also acts as a spiritual leader. Farzad is the boy in Sepehri's *Nishāni* who guides a confused man in a strange land:

خانه دوست کجاست؟" در فلق بود که پرسید سوار.

آسمان مکثي کرد.

رهگذر شاخه نوري که به لب داشت به تاريکي شن‌ها بخشيد

و به انگشت نشان داد سپيداري و گفت:

"نرسيده به درخت،

کوچه باغي است که از خواب خدا سبزتر است

و در آن عشق به اندازه پرهاي صداقت آبي است

مي‌روي تا ته آن کوچه که از پشت بلوغ، سر به در مي‌آرد،

پس به سمت گل تنهايي مي‌پيچي،

دو قدم مانده به گل،

پاي فواره جاويد اساطير زمين مي‌ماني

و تو را ترسي شفاف فرا مي‌گيرد.

در صميميت سيال فضا، خش‌خشي مي‌شنوي:

کودکي مي‌بيني

رفته از کاج بلندي بالا، جوجه بردارد از لانه نور

و از او مي‌پرسي

خانه دوست کجاست."

"Where is the friend's house?" in the morning twilight the rider asked.

The sky halted.

The passer-by gave away the branch of light

to the darkness of sand

and pointed with his finger to an aspen and said:

"before you see the tree

there is a garden-lane greener than God's dream

where love is as blue as candor's wings.

Keep on going to the lane to pass the adolescence

then, turn towards the flower of solitude,

two steps to the flower,

stop by the eternal fountain of earth myths

a translucent fear envelops you

in the intimacy of flowing space

you see a child

climbed up a pine tree, to pick a chick from the light's nest

and you ask the child

Where is the Friend's house?" (358-59)

The Poetic Treatment of *Mise-en-scène*

The symbolic, and in some cases, allegorical construction of modern Persian poetry is achieved in Kiarostami's films by employing minimal plots and non-narrative stories, based on lyrical moments set in rural areas that become a means of deploying a poetic realism. By choosing rural areas as the setting of most of his films

and real urban or suburban locations in the rest, Kiarostami, along with many other Iranian filmmakers such as Mehrjouei, Abolfazl Jalili, Bahman Qobadi, and Samira Makhmalbaf, who made their films in real locations before and after the Islamic revolution, strive to achieve a new aesthetics which emancipates unlimited possibilities. Through a minimal plot, the focus shifts to the location and different techniques of filmmaking such as lighting, color, composition, music, sound, camera angle, and camera movement. Rural areas in northern Iran with their natural greenery, olive forests, and rice paddies are the location for Kiarostami's three films commonly known as the Rostam Abad trilogy. Later, as I discussed in the previous section, in *Wind Will Carry Us* he chose an exotic location in a remote village in Kurdestan. From a formal perspective, this film is signified by its masterful composition of the location, and as Ben Zipper observes, "Kiarostami's work as a landscape artist is evident in his strong compositional distant shots of the dry hills around Siyah Dareh."[21]

Kiarostami's use of rural locations and remote settings is reminiscent of Sepehri's attention to landscape as represented in his poems like *Golestaneh*, in which the poet treats the rural environment realistically and imbues it with a poetic aura:[22]

دشت‌هايي چه فراخ!

كوه‌هايي چه بلند

در گلستانه چه بوي علفي مي‌آمد!

من در اين آبادي، پي چيزي مي‌گشتم:

پي خوابي شايد،

پي نوري، ريگي، لبخندي.

پشت تبريزي‌ها

غفلت پاكي بود، كه صدايم مي‌زد.

پاي نيزاري ماندم، باد مي‌آمد، گوش دادم:

چه كسي با من، حرف مي‌زند؟

سوسماري لغزيد.

راه افتادم.

يونجه‌زاري سر راه.

بعد جاليز خيار، بوته‌هاي گل رنگ

و فراموشي خاك.

لب آبي

گيوه‌ها را كندم، و نشستم، پاها در آب:

"من چه سبزم امروز

و چه اندازه تنم هوشيار است!

نكند اندوهي، سر رسد از پس كوه.

چه كسي پشت درختان است؟

هيچ، مي‌چرخد گاوي در كرد.

ظهر تابستان است.

سايه‌ها مي‌دانند، كه چه تابستاني است.

سايه‌هايي بي‌لك،

گوشه‌يي روشن و پاك،

كودكان احساس! جاي بازي اين‌جاست.

زندگي خالي نيست:

مهرباني هست، سيب هست، ايمان هست.

آري

تا شقايق هست، زندگي بايد كرد.

در دل من چيزي است، مثل يك بيشه نور، مثل خواب دم صبح

و چنان بي‌تابم، كه دلم مي‌خواهد

بدوم تا ته دشت، بروم تا سر كوه.

دورها آوايي است، كه مرا مي‌خواند."

دورها آوايي است، كه مرا مي‌خواند

Vast prairies!

Lofty mountains!

Sweet scent of grass in Golestaneh,

I was looking for something in this land:

perhaps a dream, some light, some sand, a smile

Behind the poplar trees

pure negligence was calling me

I stopped at a reed-bed, the wind was blowing; I listened:

Who is talking to me?

A lizard slipped,

I started walking

a hay-field in the way,

a cucumber-bed,

flower bushes,

and the oblivion of the Earth (348-52)

I put off my shoes and set down my feet dangling in the stream,

How green am I today and how observant is my body!

God forbid if grief comes from behind the mountain.

Who is behind the tree? Nobody, a cow is grazing in the field.

Noontime in summer,

only shadows know the summer,

spotless shadows, in a bright and pure corner,

Children of Emotion, here is a playground.

Life is not empty:

There is kindness, apples, and belief.

Life goes on as long as poppy flowers are alive!

Something is lurking in my heart, like a bush of light, like

A dream before daybreak

And so restless I am that I feel like running to the end of the plain, or

climbing to the top of the mountain.

A voice in the distance is calling me.

For both Sepehri and Kiarostami, landscape is the source of inspiration, purity, and knowledge.

Kiarostami's camera is sensitive to colors, light/lack of light, and its reflection on objects. The fact that he has a degree in painting and is a professional photographer may explain his responsive treatment of his environment. The green forests and fields suggest the peacefulness and inviolability of life in its most simple form. Sacredness is especially reflected by showing single trees in many of his features, as the image of a single tree in Iranian culture represents calmness, holiness, melancholy, and maturity. Both forests and single trees (with leaves or leafless) are subjects of his attention in films and photographs. The lack of light in the place where the young woman is milking the cow in *Wind Will Carry Us* underpins the theme of death in the film. When asked about this scene, Kiarostami stated that: "[d]eath is a constant theme of [this] movie, that's why I placed that scene in the darkness and deep inside the earth, not merely inside a house" (Saeed-Vafa and Rosenbaum 113). The "absence" of light in *Taste of Cherry* when Badi'i enters the grave for almost one minute with the sound of the thunderstorm may signify death and nonexistence for some viewers but the "presence" of abundance of light and its reflection on the trees on full bloom, accompanied by the hopeful tune of *Summertime* while the soldiers are marching and Kiarostami announces the end of shooting to the film crew right after the scene in the grave, implies the continuity of life (either Badi'i's or life in general) and its beauty.

Thus, the assemblage of lighted versus dark scenes in his film grammar suggests the mutual existence of life with its endless possibilities and death as a factual moment of anyone's life in his films. When the leading actor in *Wind Will Carry Us* enters the dark, he recites this poem of Farrokhzad which implicitly represents his nostalgic yearning for light and life in a dark, dead moment:

"هدیه"

...

اگر به خانه من آمدی ای مهربان برای من چراغ بیاور

ویک دریچه که از آن

به ازدحام کوچه خوشبخت بنگرم

"Present"

...

If you happen to come to my house, oh dear, bring a lamp for me; and a window

so that I can watch the crowd in the Happy street

The image of the "window" for both the poet and the filmmaker signifies hope, light, future, and spiritual insight or what is called "*Ishrāq*" in Persian. The window is also the medium of communication for both of them. There is an obstacle between the leading actor/poetic self and the window that they must overcome. Shooting films through a windshield in many of Kiarostami's movies such as *Close-Up, Life and then Nothing,* and *Taste of Cherry* underpins the same concept. His filming through a window invites the audience to perceive the world in a different way.

It is noteworthy that Kiarostami's choice of rural areas as location – contrary to what is assumed by many critics, including Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa in "Location (Physical Space) and Cultural Identity in Iranian Films" and Stephen Bransford in "Days in the Country: Representations of Rural Space and Place in Abbas Kiarostami's *Life and then Nothing*, *Through the Olive Trees* and *The Wind Will Carry Us*" – is not an explicit cultural or political statement. The restrictive measurements imposed by the Ministry of Guidance and Islamic Culture in the post-revolutionary era might have had an impact in encouraging those Iranian directors who want to give a more realistic representation of life to choose rural and suburban areas for shooting their films. The directors are not pressured to show an altered reality form in portraying rural men and women who were not exposed to westernized values and do not wish to give up their relatively traditional appearances. This choice of rural space has been interpreted by many audiences, as well as international film festivals, as a political act and has had different reactions from different audiences inside and outside Iran.[23] Hence, as my discussion throughout this chapter shows, Kiarostami's camera is a means to reveal philosophical and poetic interpretations of the reality. Also, as mentioned before, his *mise-en-scène* sensibilities stem from his particular aesthetic choice. The rural space in most of his films is a source of purity and knowledge, but a knowledge that is not tarnished with cultural or political marks. As a result, a rural space or at least a real location is a better option to show sheer reality in its primordial essence free from cultural or political concerns. Essentially, Kiarostami's filmmaking does not aim at culturally-specific questions. The questions

he proposes are to be read and reached globally. His films just happen to be shot in the land of Iran but the questions in his films are far more universal.

I should add that Kiarostami's treatment of *mise-en-scène* is in tune with his poetry. As Karimi-Hakkak and Michael Beard indicate, Kiarostami, "[l]ike Rumi, the poet of the largest questions in all of Persian poetry … reaches out to the world rather than focusing on any local topic. His thinking is cosmopolitan, humane, and global" (*Walking With the Wind* 10). Karimi-Hakkak's commentary on Kiarostami's poems could be suitably applied to his films, to which I refer now to close my discussion on Kiarostami's treatment of *mise- en- scène*:

> [Kiarostami's poetry] ought to be experienced phenomenologically as direct manifestations of states of being. The sustained pursuit may, in the end rest in surprising revelations of the ultimate insufficiency of a culturally determined sense of aesthetic pleasure, bound by ideology, by history, or by aesthetic convention. To make this understandable to those accustomed to such poetry, we need to expound a theory of the poetic image as independent of ideology or history, poetry without a past, immediately referable to ontology. A poetry in which it is the immediate manifestation of our hearts and souls, in their existential being, apprehended in their actuality. Human behavior reveals the human-ness of human beings caught in the act of being themselves, rather than creatures of history, culture or circumstance. ("From Imagistic Esthetics"10)[24]

Isolated Humans in Their Confrontation with the World

Since he made *Homework* in 1990, Kiarostami has preferred to shoot his films exclusively in exteriors and usually in rural regions or *en route*. In my view, his choice of exteriors implies the confrontation of man with nature, God, and life in a general sense. Being away from a cozy domestic space could also suggest lack of privacy and the isolation of his leading characters in their lives. Badi'i in *Taste of Cherry* is so isolated that he drives on roads to find somebody with whom to share his thoughts with. The leading actor in *Wind Will Carry Us* is set on a journey to an exotic land to find out about life and death. He is an isolated man who fails to communicate with his wife – this is shown by depicting him ironically by the telecommunications construction site when talking to his complaining wife and a dissatisfied boss who is not convinced by his explanations. Being cut off from a complaining wife, a demanding boss, and the film crew, he confronts the meaning of life in its profound form in his confrontation with nature. In a different setting in the world of children, we are invited to see the friendless Ahmad in *Where Is the Friend's House?* watching the world from his viewpoint to observe the indifference and hypocrisy of the grownups who leave him in his search for his friend's house.

These isolated characters are in a constant state of searching in life. The journey is a recurring motif in Kiarostami's films and this is how the image of the road, which is also seen frequently, becomes more important. This motif is an important theme in both classical and contemporary Persian literature. In his poem, "Neday-e Aghaz [The Call of Debut]," Sohrab Sepehri pinpoints the same subject. The last part of the poem reads:

باید امشب چمدانی را

که به اندازه پیراهن تنهایی من جا دارد، بردارم

و به سمتی بروم

که درختان حماسی پیداست،

رو به آن وسعت بی‌واژه که همواره مرا می‌خواند.

یك نفر باز صدا زد: سهراب

کفش‌هایم کو؟

کفش‌هایم کو؟

Tonight I should take the suitcase,

which suits my loneliness dress

and head in the direction where the mythical trees appear,

head to that vast wordless realm which is calling me

Somebody is calling again: Sohrab

Where are my shoes?

Where are my shoes? (392-93)

Like Sepehri's poetic persona in this poem, the isolated characters in Kiarostami's movies start their journeys in response to their inner voice. This journey originates at a physical point but the outcome is spiritual. The isolated characters in Kiarostami's films shown on the roads, displaced and wandering from one place to another, also

suggest the fact that life is transitory. This matter is specifically represented in *Wind Will Carry Us*, which as mentioned before, borrowed its title from Forough's poem of the same title. In this poem, the poetic self is desperately watching how life is passing away. When Behzad goes to the dark cavern to ask the young lady to milk the cow, he recites this poem to her, referring to the fact that life speedily goes by:

در شب کوچک من افسوس

باد با برگ درختان میعادی دارد

در شب کوچک من دلهره ی یک ویرانی است

...

گوش کن وزش ظلمت را می شنوی؟

من غریبانه به این خوشبختی می نگرم

من به نومیدی خود معتادم

گوش کن

وزش ظلمت را می شنوی؟

باد ما را با خود خواهد برد

In my little night, alas

the wind has a date with the trees

in my little night there is the fear of devastating

Listen

Can you hear the darkness blowing?

I am nostalgically looking to this joy

I am addicted to my hopelessness

Listen

You can hear the darkness blowing

...

Wind Will Carry Us.

And that is why the filmmaker/engineer (who is reflexively Kiarostami's alter ego) comes to realize that we should celebrate the moment, here and now. He feels that "'moment' is his share written on the sheets of history," as Farrokhzad once said.[25] To Kiarostami, "life is [like] swimming in the 'present', little pond," [26] to borrow the term from Sepehri. This little pond called 'present' is disconnected from the past or future.

Abbas Kiarostami, like his poetic models Sohrab Sepehri and Forough Farrokhzad, defamiliarizes familiar reality to represent the beauty of life hidden in one's being. Kiarostami's films evade current political issues to embrace simple but poetic moments and lyricism in the lives of individuals who live and survive in a harsh environment. Kiarostami's use of rural landscapes, amateur actors, poetic shots – such as a turtle, shot at different moments in *The Wind Will Carry Us* – problematize aesthetic values and conventions of filmmaking, leading the audience to derive meaning from the absence of linear narration.

By taking a poetical/philosophical approach to filmmaking, Kiarostami proved Alexandre Astruc's prophecy about the concept of *caméra stylo* (camera pen). In "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra Stylo" Astruc announces that "the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its

own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language.[…] It can tackle any subject, any genre (18-19). He goes on to state," I will go so far as to say that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only the cinema can do justice to them. […] [A] Descartes of today would already have shut himself up in his bedroom with a 16mm camera and some film, and would be writing his philosophy on film" (19). "From today onwards" Austruc asserts, "it will be possible for the cinema to produce works which are equivalent, in their profundity and meaning to the novels of Faulkner and Malraux, to the essays of Sartre and Camus" (20). Kiarostami is that philosopher of today, already using his digital camera, who borrowed Persian poetic conceptions to propose his philosophy of life through a cinematic language that is an equivalent to poetic language. In the process of the change of the literary dominant in Iran, from poetry in the 60s to cinema in the 80s and onward, poetic language gave way to a rich cinematic language charged with poetic/philosophical concepts. In the cinema that he presents, words and music belonging to other forms of art, as well as visual and special movements belonging exclusively to the art of cinema, bring about a harmonic existence in which the distinction between director and author is gone since he writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen.

In the midst of dramatic transformations in his society during the revolution, or the war with Iraq, Kiarostami trains his camera on simple issues such as a toothache – in *Dandān Dard* (*Toothache*, 1980) – or the notion of duty and assignment – in *Homework*. Many local critics have in fact criticized him as being detached from contemporary issues. But in my view his aesthetic engagement with the nature of

reality and life on a deeper level de-abstracts our construction of reality to embrace the concrete and palpable moments of life that are experienced by all humans in the world. His cinematic work is deeply involved in everyday life while appearing detached from it. His focus of attention is, unlike many other Iranian filmmakers, genuine human feelings translated into the language of images, not seemingly external affairs such as politics. It is this focus on matters of universal human concern that makes his films a form of art, free from any location or time. Although Farrokhzad and Sepehri's poetry also dealt with the same internal feelings, because of the linguistic barrier their poems never managed to appeal to a transnational audience in a broad scale. On the other hand, Kiarostami's images provided a global camera-pen whose message reaches transnational audiences.

Through a masterful intermingling of poetic discourse with his film grammar, Kiarostami has achieved a profoundly humanist approach to cinema. His camera makes the audience look again at reality, fiction, and media as an offshoot of the fusion of fact and fiction by revealing the relations between the signifier, or the produced meaning, and the signified which is the modes of production. Kiarostami does not shy away from deliberately fusing fact and fiction to remind the audience of the artificiality of constructing a factual point. To attain this goal, he sometimes uses an ironical and witty cinematic language that is harshly self-critical and self-reflexive. In representing life both factually and fictionally, he employs a simple approach in his filmmaking, giving his films a fresh perspective far from cultural and ideological judgments, similar to the poetics of Farrokhzad and Sepehri's. Like his predecessor, Shahid Sales, he sets aside political concerns to investigate things "*before* they are

perceived, understood, analyzed, [and] judged," as Dabashi puts it (*Close Up* 47). The poetic language Kiarostami inherited from Farrokhzad and Sepehri to employ on his cinema, turned into a *caméra stylo* as flexible and as subtle as those poems that inspired his perspective, results in a poetic film style comparable to the best of world cinema.

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[1] I have adopted this term from Sirus Shamisa

[2] The emphasis is mine.

[3] Moreover, in the "seamless reality" that is usually used in mainstream cinema productions, the camera-work, lighting, sound, editing, and color do not draw the spectator's attention as it intends to enhance the illusion of a fixed reality.

4 Hillmann in *A Lonely Woman: Forough Farrokhzad and Her Poetry*, 77-78, and Milani in *Farrokhzad: Bride of Acacias* 146.

[5] Here I have used Hillmann's translation in *A Lonely Woman* (77).

[6] My dissertation looks at Farrokhzad's poetry in its relation to Kiyārustami's film grammar, not her life or the detailed autobiographical aspects of her poetry. For more information regarding her life and its relation to her poems please refer to Michael Hillmann's *A Lonely Woman: Forough Farrokhzad and Her Poetry.*

[7] "Paradise Regained: Farrokhzad's "Garden Conquered." *Forough Farrokhzad: A Quarter Century Later*. Ed. Michael Hillman. University of Texas at Austin P. Austin, 1988. 91-105.

[8] Kiyārustami's superb fresh look at subjects is capable of surprise in the most obvious matters (from a grownup perspective). One such example is in one of his poems, which poeticizes and defamiliarizes a simple event such as a leaf falling on its shadow. The poem reads:

برگ چنار:
فرو می افتد آرام
و قرار می گیرد
بر سایه خویش
در نیمروز بهاری

Autumn afternoon:
a sycamore leaf
falls softly

and rests
on its own shadow

Here I have used Karimi-Hakkak and Bread's translation and analysis (57).

[9] For more on this refer to http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/arts/story/2005/04/050428_pm-Kiyārustami-iv.shtml

[10] According to Nasser Saffarian, this film was released by Golestan Studios in a shortened or censored edition after Farrokhzad's death. However, on its 40th anniversary, Saffarian released the original film accompanied with commentaries by Iranian filmmakers and critics. Ebrahim Golestan initially denied there was a second version of *The House Is Black*, but since I had the opportunity to see both versions, I am convinced that the one that was released 40 years ago was not the original version. In my discussion of *The House Is Black* I am referring to the original version.

[11] *The House Is Black* is not a single instance in Farrokhzad's film profile. She was an active member of Golestan Studios that made several prize-winning documentaries. Among other films, she assisted in the production of Ebrahim Golestan's *Khisht va Ayinih* (*Mudbrick and Mirror* 1964) and played an unacknowledged role in the film. As Hillmann asserts, this film has shared themes with Farrokhzad's Poem "Ay Marz'i Pur Guhar" (Oh! Jewel-Studded Land) (55). In 1965, Farrokhzad also participated in two short films, "one made under the auspices of UNESCO and the other filmed in Tehran by Bernardo Bertolucci. Only six months before her death her filmmaking career was on the verge of expanding beyond Persia. At the 'Authors' Film Festival' in Pesaro in 1966 she was invited by some Swedish filmmakers to make a film in Sweden. She had agreed to go. She also left plans for a scenario depicting the life of a Persian woman" (Banani 6). Moreover, Farrokhzad acted in theater and translated a few dramas into Persian.

[12] In *The House Is Black* commentary.

[13] As Kaveh Golestan in *The House Is Black* commentary indicates, this realist pictorial approach to a social problem already existed in documentary reports in the journals of that period in Iran.

[14] Amir Karrari, a member of Farrokhzad's film crew points out that Farrokhzad's style required long takes at the time of shooting which were to be later edited into smaller pieces related to other scenes through editing. He states that Farrokhzad would not necessarily arrange the edited parts in synchronic order (*The House Is Black* Commentary).

[15] Golestan's dispassionate account is very similar to the teacher's criticizing and secular approach towards the funeral ceremony in Siyah Darrih in *Wind Will Carry Us*. My later discussion of this movie, which sheds light on some aspects of the villagers' perception of reality (for example, in terms of Farzad, and the local doctor), will clarify how Kiatorstami, like Farrokhzad, brings a critical two-fold version of reality with regard to the villagers' beliefs and worldview, as both humane and self-destructive.

[16] Bahram Bayzai in *The House Is Black* commentary.

[17] There is a linguistic/cultural point here that I should explain: In Iran, people who are considered superior either economically or from a class-structure point of view are called, by the lower-class, not by their names but by the title of their class or profession, such as doctor, engineer, colonel, khan and so forth. This also holds true when people wish to show their respect to someone. Most often, whether these people are really doctors or engineers, for example, or have similar professions, people call them by these titles to show their consideration. For example, they might call a nurse a doctor, or a sergeant is called a colonel. In modern times, as this class-conscious structure is problematized, such title

attribution is treated sarcastically. The title of engineer given to Behzad has a humorous tone for the Iranian audience and makes the whole movie more ironical.

[18] I will explain the signification of this poem in *Wind Will Carry Us* in detail in this chapter.

[19] I have taken this poem from a collection of Farrokhzad's letters to Parviz Shapur, her husband, entitled *The First Love Beats of My Heart* (269), and compiled by her son Kamyar Shapur and Omran Salahi.

[20] He introduces himself to the girl, who milks the cow, as her fiancé's boss when he goes to the cavern. His treatment of Farzad is also controlling and domineering.

[21]"Iranian Cinema at MIFF 2000". In *Senses of Cinema.* http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/festivals/00/9/iranian.html May 15, 2005.

[22] Golestaneh is a village near the city of Kashan, Iran.

[23] One such reaction is seen among the Iranian audiences who prefer a more aggressive and revolutionary cinematic approach, similar to the third cinema of Ebrahim Hatami Kia or early Makhmalbaf movies. In "Unmediated Event Writing," Javad Toosi, for instance, calls Kiyārustami's Rostamabad trilogy "a cowardice conservatism of a director who is repeating himself in Posteh and Koker, and Rostamabad" which is far from "his bold and daring perspective in *Report*, *Traveler*, and *A Suite for Wedding*" (188).

[24] This article was presented at The Conference on Iranian Cinema as 21st Century Persian Literature, University of Texas at Austin, April 19-21, 2002. Upon my request, Dr. Karimi-Hakkak kindly sent this article to me. A version of this article is published entitled "Contemporary Trinds in Persian Poetry," in *Wasafiri* 38, Spring 2003: 56-60."

[25]

حس میکنم که " لحظه" سهم من از برگ های تاریخ است

("پنجره")

[26]This is a translation of Sipihrī's verse from "The Sound of Water Footsteps":

زندگی تر شدن پی در پی
زندگی آب تنی در حوضچه اکنون است

Chapter Three:

Modernity and Identity in a Cinematic Perspective

The Philosophical and Historical Background

The story of modernity is one of the most controversial topics amongst the Iranian intelligentsia. As a scholar, translator, playwright, and filmmaker, Bahram Bayzai is among those who have dealt with the questions of modernity and identity before and after the Islamic revolution. Generally speaking, the Iranian identity and the changes of self and identity influenced by modernity are central questions in Bayzai's films. His filmmaking approach is *philosophically* modern in the sense that it is an effort to shed light on the problems that puzzle contemporary humans. The ensuing discussion addresses the influence of modernity in relation to Bayzai's films.

Before examining the notion of Iranian modernity and its impact on Bayzai's filmmaking, I should define how the three terms modernity, modernization, and modernism are used throughout this chapter. These three notions, in some cases, are used interchangeably; however, in my discussion, each of these terms signifies a specific concept that differs from the other two. Modernity is the philosophy behind all the modernist exercises, including, for instance, modern artistic forms, as well as, modernized industry and architecture. Thus, my discussion deals with modernity as "an ethos rather than a well-demarcated historical period" (Tavakoli-Targhi 9). In contrast to modernism, modernity could not be exported to a community or society. On the other hand, the modern equipment and technology get imported from one geographical region to another. Modernism is the concrete and pragmatic application

of modernity. While modernity exists on the ontological level of a culture, modernism is represented on its external level. Similar to modernism, modernization resides in the economical and socio-political vistas of a society, while modernity, as an ethos, is potentially capable to uproot religious beliefs or the philosophical background of a culture. Sometimes, modernization refers to the state-funded developments at the structural and external levels in non-Western societies. It usually evokes a political exercise that is nourished by certain ideological principles. Abbas Mirza's modernizations of the Iranian army or Reza Shah's modernizing attempts in the economic and bureaucratic zones are examples of modernization in Iran.[1]

The artistic responses to the issue of modernity in Iran were deeply impacted by social and historical facts. As a result, I dedicate a subsection of this chapter to a historical overview of Iranian modernity before addressing this issue in terms of Bayzai's filmmaking. In addition, it is worth noting that my discussion of modernity challenges the notion that modernity is a Western phenomenon and that the East has come to it late (Lewis 40-73). My argument is based on the postmodern and postcolonial scholarship which unsettled the "naturalized" percept that considered the West as the original home of modernity and rationality. Alternatively, my analysis endorses modernity as "a product of a globalizing network of power and knowledge that informed the heterotopic experiences of crisscrossing peoples and cultures and thus provided multiple scenarios of self-refashioning" (Tavakoli-Targhi 4).

The history of Persian modern projects and the Persian texts of modernity, as Tavakoli-Targhi indicates, date back to the 17th century (1-17). Daneshmand Khan Shafi'a Yazdi (b. 1620) and Raja Jai Singh (1688-1743) are two examples of

Persianate scholars who tackled modern projects "at a time when Europe was still plagued with religious wars" (Tavakoli-Targhi 10). Under the colonial influences, these self-refashioning projects in Iran and other parts of the Persian-speaking world were forgotten and dehistoricized. The later Persian historiographical accounts were subject to a cultural amnesia that resulted in self-Orientalism. Since these texts vanished from history, the modern projects of the 17th century did not have a significant impact on the subsequent modernized movements in Iran.

The intellectual movements and the confrontation with the "question" of modernity in the last two centuries in Iran can be divided into two major parts: the ones that led to the constitutional revolution[2] (1905-1911) and the Islamic revolution (1978). The Iranians' awakening to Western hegemony in the mid-19th century is represented in the modernist ideas of both the government-oriented and the independent groups of common people. Among the government-affiliated individuals, Abbas Mirza (1789-1833), the crown prince in the Qajar dynasty, brought new ideas to the Iranian government and army (Heribert 221, Avery 159). The other individual who had a great influence on the process of Iranian modernity was Amir Kabir (1804-1852), the chief minister of Naser-adin Shah. His main reformist acts contained the establishment of the first modern college in Iran (Dar ol-Fonun). Moreover, Amir Kabir contributed to the intellectual atmosphere of the country through publishing a journal entitled *Vaghāyi' Itifāqiyh* (*The Current Events*) (Avery 493). The modernist ideas, however, were not exclusively brought to the society through the royal family and high-ranking authorities. For instance, Jamal-edin Asadabadi's (1839-97) writings on modernity and the reasons for, what he called, "the Moslims' cultural decline" and

the Iranians' "backwardness" had a decisive impact on the formation of modern debates in Iran. Asadabadi's global concerns were published in a Parisian-based Arabic journal entitled *Urwa-al Wuthqa* (*Indissoluble Link*) (Shayegan, *Cultural Schizophrenia* 51). Eventually, these conscious responses to the question of modernity culminated in the constitutional revolution and later on the Islamic revolution. I would like to reemphasize that, despite many critics, including Vanessa Martin and Mangol Bayat, I do not believe that the birth of modernity was totally initiated by the modernized attempts of a group of elites, either in the Qajar era or in the Pahlavi epoch. On the contrary, the masses had a great impact on the shaping of modernity in Iran from the very beginning (Afary 3; Ziba-Kalaam 340-89). As Janet Afary indicates, the constitutional revolution in Iran was not merely a political revolution. It had "multiclass, multicultural, and multiideological dimensions", informed by Western-style parliamentary democracy, Russian intellectual movements, and the *anjumans,* or the grassroots popular associations (3). The constitutional revolution in Iran popularized the modern ideas and philosophy amongst the masses. Influenced by similar movements in Russia and Europe, the masses forced the government to restrict the Shah's power to grant freedom of press, speech, and association.

The constitutional revolution brought a relatively democratic atmosphere for the writers and journalists. Moreover, it reinforced modernist debates in intellectual circles. In this era, thinkers and scholars such as Mohammad Khiyabani, Talebzadeh, and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani critically discussed the concept of modernity and the subsequent changes at the societal level (Dast-Gheyb 68). In intellectual circles, the notion of modernity and its relation to the West were addressed as challenging

concepts. These debates, in many instances, were affected by "self-Orientalizing rhetorical argument[s]" that influenced later investigations of modernity in Iran (Tavakoli-Targhi x).

The constitutional revolution ultimately failed in 1911 due to both external pressures and internal conflicts. As Afary pinpoints, the problems constitutional revolution faced included "penetration by Western imperialism, pressure from within and without to modernize along with Western models, demands from below for democracy, conflict with religious institutions, [and] women's emancipation" (12). For many constitutionalists, the constitutional revolution was a means to modernization by following the Western model. In the Pahlavi era, the modernization of the society accelerated through governmental projects practiced mostly on the industrial and technological levels, as well as the life style of the upper middle classes. The underlying philosophy of modernity was not consistently examined except in the intellectual circles.

The Iranian revolution in 1979 was a significant political moment that initiated a series of changes in the national cultural patterns and helped the crafting of a new identity for Iranians. However, the groundwork for these changes had already been laid in the decade before the revolution. To explore the post-revolutionary cultural evolution we must go back to the 1960s, when Iranian society was on the brink of a great upheaval. The socio-political and religious change in Iran was partly caused by a shift in the Shiite clerical authority dating back to 1961 (Dabashi, *Close Up* 25). At this time, Ayatollah Khomeini, whose ideology introduced a politically charged version of Islam to his followers, replaced the moderate leadership of

Ayatollah Boroujerdi. The year 1961, in Iranian history, is the onset of a new era in which Islam and politics were to be intermingled more than any other time in the contemporary history.[3] In 1963, Ayatollah Khomeini led a major uprising against the Shah's "White Revolution" which was brutally suppressed. On a different vista, the rejection of the uncritical adoption of foreign values led to a shift in the intellectual discourse best represented by Jalal-e al-e Ahmad's popular treatise *Gharb-Zadigī* (*Westoxication*), published in 1962. Around this time, the cultural forms of production including cinema responded to this agitated atmosphere of the Iranian society. Although the cultural evolution in the 1950s and 1960s was heavily influenced by socio-political changes of the Iranian society, literary activists and artists have had their own share on the move in engaging with the concept of modernity. Sadegh Hedayat in fiction, Nima Yushij in poetry, and Jalal-e Al-e Ahmad in social criticism were the leading national icons. Later on filmmakers such as Bahram Bayzai and Daryush Mehrjuei were added to these cultural heroes who joined a new generation of cultural activists.

The political changes of the 60s, produced ideologues such as Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shari'ati with their strong Marxist/socialist, and anti-colonial backgrounds. It is obvious that these intellectuals' "embrace of Islam forced them to create a radically alternative form of revolutionary socialism" (Mirsepassi 155). But as Ali Mirsepassi asserts in *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization*, the "Iranian Revolution was not a simple clash between modernity and tradition but an attempt to accommodate modernity within a sense of authentic Islamic [and I want to

add Iranian] identity" (1). Mirsepassi explores movements such as the Iranian Islamic revolution as:

> Movements [that] promote social and cultural institutions which are modern but "authentically local". These "local" forms of resistance confront a global problem—the universalizing and homogenizing tendencies of "Western" modernity—and thus they have a distinctly universal character. The politics of modernity is therefore neither local nor authentic. What matters is that it is grounded in some construction of "local". (127)

This embracement of "locality" or at least a "constructed locality" and modernity or universality in post-revolutionary Iran necessarily and logically led to a new definition of culture and identity in Iran. In this chapter, I examine the way this new definition of identity, influenced by the two Iranian revolutions – especially the Islamic revolution – is represented in Iranian cinema, and how it has changed this form of cultural production to pinpoint a new era in the Iranian cultural scene.

Years before Al-e Ahmad's popularization of *Westoxication*, Ahmad Fardid's proposal on the negative impact of the West on the East failed to engage the people. Fardid's philosophy was not celebrated by the nation; instead, it was doomed to be buried in intellectual circles. On the contrary, the instructive ideas of Al-e Ahmad and Shari'ati, as the two main theoretical architectures of the Islamic revolution a decade before it happened, were quickly popularized. In short, the movements that eventually ended up in the Islamic revolution were the result of a "massive" response to, and the

analytical rethinking of, the Western values adopted in the previous century. These movements brought a modernity that was based on local values and traditions.

This response was especially crucial if we consider the fact that in the modern era, the West was "discovering" the East by "constructing" a self-congratulatory history of European civilization as the original cause behind rationalization and enlightenment (Tavakoli-Targhi 8-9). In its examination, the West considered the East as the significant but still inferior other. It resulted in the emergence of the notions of the Orient and Orientalism. As Mehrzad Boroujerdi asserts, apart from China and India, which became the subject of the West's other-ness, "the Islamic Orient became Europe's collective nightmare, a world prone to exotic and erotic fantasies" (7). Boroujerdi goes on to say that: for "Western thinkers, the 'Orientals' who included Muslims, Arabs, Turks, and Persians, were only occupying a 'discursive space'. They served as Rousseau's ideal type of "noble savage" and as Montesquieu's fictitious travelers to Paris in *Lettres persanes*" (7). Furthermore, it was through the inventing of this idea of Orient as the other that "Europe was able to create and maintain its own identity" (Boroujerdi 7, also stated in Tavakoli-Targhi 2).

Europe attained this identity through subjecting Orientalism to "imperialism, positivism, utopianism, historicism, Darwinism, racism, Freudianism, Marxism, Spenglerism" (Boroujerdi 882). Post-Saidian scholars such as Tavakoli-Targhi indicated that attributing modernity to the West was merely a result of "genesis amnesia in European [and Eastern] historiograph[ies]" (3).[4] For instance, as mentioned before, the modern texts that were produced by Persianate scholars in India and Iran, as early as the mid-seventeenth century, were neglected in contemporary

histories written in Iran and the West (Tavakoli-Targhi 1-16). This cultural amnesia, Tavakoli-Targhi indicates, caused the Eastern countries, including Iran, to redefine themselves "in relation to Europe," while Europeans established their status as the architects of universal modernity and rationality (4). Tavakoli-Targhi goes on to say: [t]his *amnesiac* or *forgetful* assertion gained hegemonic currency and thus constituted "non-Western" modernity as "Westernization" (4).

The intellectual/philosophical settings that eventually led to the Islamic revolution in Iran were responsive acts to this dehistoricizing perception. It was the onset of a new era in which Iran strived to revisit the West, modernity and the philosophy behind it. Therefore, the Iranian self rearticulated a new identity. This rearticulation was an attempt to recover the Iranian self that was the focus of Orientalism and self-Orientalism. Iranians were now conscious of the economic, and more importantly, cultural impact of Western thought. Scholars such as Jamshid Behnam, Masha'allah Ajoodani, and Daryush Ashuri, continued the legacy established by Fardid and Al-e Ahmad to explore the impact of modernity and globalization on Iranians. More significantly, though, was the active participation of artists and grassroots in this identity-constructing exercise. What were being reconstructed on both artistic and popular levels were the definitions of self and identity. In this sense, the Islamic revolution was a "modern" political response to the West and Western hegemony. There were many social/intellectual strata participating in the revolution and most of these groups tried to consolidate local values within a local definition of modernity. Collectively, they fought against the Shah's regime that adopted Western values unquestionably, but the ultimate "dominating" idea in the

1978 revolution was the ideology of combat, based on Ayatollah Khomeini's new interpretation of Islam, whose ultimate goal was to become the center of the Islamic world (*Umm ol Qora'*) and to "export" the revolution and its values to the rest of the world.

Once again, Iranians, who were faced with the executions and terrors of a religious government did not benefit, either intellectually or economically, from their struggles to overthrow the Shah. In the cultural scene, the post-revolutionary era was witnessing a change of the "dominant" from poetry to cinema in the realm of artistic forms of expression. In my discussion of Kiarostami's cinema, I have examined how poetry influenced Iranian cinema and made this shifting of the dominant possible. In my close examination of Bahram Bayzai's films, I want to argue that, in the "real" political scene it was the ideology of combat that became the dominant political monologue. On the contrary, cinema, as the dominant artistic form of expression imagined and explored the question of modernity, the global world, and the crisis of identity by using the "image" and cinema in a dialogical fashion. This shift of focus, from a theo/monological perspective to a dialogical one in cinematic productions is notably significant, as it represents how the nation and the state are going their separate ways. What Iranian cinema was imagining did not contribute to nurture the Islamic state's envisioning of modernity and identity.

Cinema, as a modernist implement, was a European or American invention, depending on different accounts,[5] and in its Iranian context, an offshoot of a modernization exercise that was introduced, first to the royal family, and then to the Iranian masses by Mozaffar o-din Shah's cameraman, Mirza Ebrahim-Khan Akkas-

Bashi, in 1900.[6] Although cinema was imported from the West, in its later productions in Iran, it is not to be entirely used to further Western values. In a centrifugal change, the more modernization and its outgrowths – among them cinema – become global phenomena, the less they stick to their Western origin.

Modernism, during the last two centuries, significantly flourished in Europe and later in North America. Although I should note that the progress of the West in terms of inventing modernist equipments was the result of its borrowing of non-Western modern ideas[7] and its modernist science and technology, as well as the vast resources of the colonized non-Western countries. In this non-Eurocentric perspective, the modernist achievements of the West were the result of "a collective heritage [and] an omnivorous mélange of cultures" (Shohat and Stam 14). Therefore, these modernist accomplishments could be considered the fruition of a global collaboration (either voluntarily or non-voluntarily) of "the interdependence … [and] diverse worlds" (Shohat and Stam 14).

During the colonial and post-colonial periods, these "Western" modernist achievements were embraced globally. In this phase, modernism was negotiated as a colonial network of power and knowledge and a new dominating force. In the new context, modernism and modernity began mutual dialogical relationships with the indigenous cultures. These cultures, subsequently, started to transform in order to accommodate both the traditional customs and the new modernist ideas and technology.[8]

Modernity as a philosophy and ethos is a diverse and global phenomenon with many possible ontological representations. Although it is influenced by modernism

and modernization practices, it is not entirely dependent on these two notions. In a non-Western country such as Iran, modernity is deeply rooted in national and local traditions and history. Besides, the impact of global modernism in the country reinforced the birth of new cultural and philosophical discourses, still modern but quintessentially local and non-Western. This reconciliation of the non-Western traditions with modernity brings new settings that could disturb the notions of self and identity. Against this backdrop, I argue that in Bayzai's films, the subject, whether set in a rural or urban setting, negotiates with an unsettled identity resulted from the birth of these new cultural and philosophical paradigms.

Although it is crucial to consider the fact that after the establishing of the Islamic revolution in Iran the Iranian subject, betrayed by both the constitutional and Islamic revolutions, was confronted, more than ever, with a quintessential question of his or her position in the modern world. As Nayereh Tohidi states, the constitutional movement "never managed to overthrow feudalism and neocolonial dimensions, and did not succeed in implementing its bourgeois-democratic goals ..." (255). In a similar fashion, the Islamic revolution was unsuccessful in bringing a democratic aura into the society. The Iranian self was still tackling with unanswered questions in terms of the Iranian identity in the national and global milieus. Neither the modernized attempts of the Pahlavis, nor the suppressive policies of the theocrats were satisfying answers to the questions of identity in Iran. Bahram Bayzai was among the intellectuals who engaged with this question from a philosophical standpoint. His concern was to investigate the concept of modernity that stands beyond Iranian modernization or the modernist dimensions of the Iranian culture and society. His medium to reach the core

of problem is film, enriched with his unique knowledge of Eastern and Iranian performing and visual arts.

Centering the Subject by Employing the "Canned Theater" Approach

The crucial issue in Bayzai's films is the way the "subject" conceives the world. His meticulous examination of the self as subject since the 1970s initiated a new trind in the Iranian cinema in which the individual and his or her internal universe take precedence over the external world. This was an innovative direction in the Iranian cinema that was, and to some extent is, exploring the social environment as defining elements in the acts of the humans in their social context. In films such as Avanes Oganians' *Hājī Āqā, The Movie Star* (1932), Farrokh Ghaffari's *Downtown* (1958) or Mehrjuei's *The Cow* society is signified as the decisive element that predetermines the characters' behavior. It is a cultural legacy represented in these veterans' filmmaking stylistics. This emphasis has also resonated in more recent films such as Rakhshan Bani Etemad's *Nargiss* (1992). In the case of *Nargiss*, Saeed-Vafa declares that:

> the main character's evil habits of stealing and living with an older female accomplice are presented as a result of social ills and unemployment. The evil is in society, not in the characters. It seems that as martyrs, heroes or even victims, the characters cannot even afford to own their shadows. Their dark sides are blamed on their enemies and others, or in general on society. ("Location and Cultural Identity" 205)

It was against this backdrop that Bayzai concentrated on "the subject" instead of on the social signifiers. The shifting from a subjugated personality, conceded by the

metaphysical supremacy and hegemonic forces of the society, to a subject becomes a crucial movement when it is examined in its cultural context. In a value system which privileges the community over the individual, the Iranian self was being treated as merely "a part of the whole" throughout history. It was the society into which the self should be dissolved to function as a meaningful element. This recalls a passage by Farzaneh Milani, where she examines the reasons why Iranians shy away from writing autobiographical accounts. In this passage, she diagnoses the centrality of community with a lack of attention to the individual:

> [The absence of autobiography] is perhaps the logical extension of a culture that creates, expects, and even values a sharply defined separation between the inner and the outer, the private and the public. Perhaps it bespeaks a mode of being and behavior that is shaped or misshaped, by varying degrees and types of censorship, both external and internal. In short, it could be one more manifestation of strong forces of deindividualization, protection, and restraint ("Veiled Voices" 2).

This cultural "deindividualization" did not merely affect the genre of life writing, or, more specifically, the absence of autobiography as a sub-genre in Persian literature. It also disallowed the subject to become the focus of attention in other artistic modes of expression[9] including cinema. Bayzai's characters, on the other hand, represent the uprooted selves who challenge the divine destiny and the influence of cosmic, metaphysical, or social forces in human affairs.

Form Mr. Hekmati in *Thunder Shower* to Golrokh in *Sag-Kushī* (*Dog-Eat-Dog*, 2000) the subject in his films is confronting external problems as well as the force of destiny, a burden laid on Iranians' shoulders by both the Zoroastrian and Islamic theologies. Nonetheless, the subject in these films is not looking for social security but strives to find meaning from the inside. The ensuing discussion sheds light on the way the subject in Bayzai's films becomes a key element in deciding and dominating her world. While Kiarostami was mastering a *cinema-verité* style in which the exterior world was showcased and highlighted in a seemingly realist manner, Bayzai fashioned a highly polished and understated drama of peoples' interior world. No matter if he chooses an urban or rural setting, and regardless of its historical or contemporary aura, his films have modern sensibilities in the sense that they are about the subject's perceptions, emotions, and the sense of alienation.

The exterior world depicted in Bayzai's films signifies a state of ambiguity and uncertainty. The magical realist settings of both the foggy seashore in *Chirīki'i Tārā* (*The Ballad of Tara*, 1978) and a poorly lit forest location in *Gharībih va Mih* (*The Stranger and the Fog*, 1974) imply the philosophical uncertainty with which the characters are dealing. This imagery of uncertainty, however, is not exclusively portrayed in Bayzai's films with a magic realist setting. For instance, in *Dog-Eat-Dog* that provokes a realist impression, Bayzai represents the crowded Tehran streets, where soldiers march and the martyrs' portraits embellish the city walls. While every Tehrani resident was accustomed to seeing similar scenes, Bayzai's portrayal is an overstated and dramatized version of reality that evokes cultural instability and an uncertainty associated with war and chaos. These are only a few instances of the

dramatic exterior world Bayzai represents in his films to resonate a psychological imagery.

Nevertheless, it is always the subject who decides and dominates her destiny as she finds her way through her roots and historical identity. This movement in Iranian film aesthetics should be acknowledged as a significant move. In the dominant film aesthetics, the self has a merely trivial role in the community. Contrariwise, in Bayzai's films, the self arises to become the center and agent of all changes in her surroundings. While Bayzai's *decoupage* is heavily codified by Iranian and Eastern mythologies, the characters do not live in the light of existing myths but refashion and, sometimes, de-mythologize them. Having roots in tradition, women such as Kiyan (in *Shāyad Vaqtī Dīgar* [*Perhaps Some Other Time*, 1988]), Asieh (in *Kalāgh* [*The Crow*, 1977]), and Na'i (in *Bashu: The Little Stranger*, 1986) are "free spirits"[10] who challenge their social collective norms. As the new mythical figures, who represent the modern Iranian subject, they seek their roots in their past and, simultaneously, signify the emergence of new ideas in their society. Bayzai's philosophical insight examines his characters confrontation with modernity. They are searching for a new identity inspired by their background to fit into the modern definitions of the modern era.

Asieh in *The Crow* is a particular example of a woman in a modern urban space, negotiating with both her cultural past and the modern life style that informed the Tehrani upper class society in the Shah's era. The story begins when Aman Esalat, a TV anchor, is conducting research for a new topic in his program. While searching the newspapers, Esalat discovers an advertisement about a missing girl. Esalat and his

wife Asieh, a teacher in a school for the deaf, become seriously involved in an investigation to find the girl. At the same time, Asieh assists her mother-in-law Alam in writing her memoir. Besides, Asieh is portrayed as a woman in search of a new definition of her identity in a society on the brink of a massive change as this film was made during the upheavals of the Islamic revolution. She depicts the dynamic status of an Iranian culture that strives to cope with both modernity and its past. Asieh's uncertainty about her identity does not merely stem from the fact that she was uprooted from her own social class. In a similar way, among the upper class family of her husband, she faces uncertainty and confusion. Asieh is engaging in a dialogue with history through both her imaginary and real visits to the old neighborhoods of Tehran. Furthermore, she is seriously involved with exploring the young girl's story that is being recovered. In the afternoons, she writes Alam's memoir as the old lady narrates it to Asieh. As the story unfolds, the spectator realizes that these events are all interrelated.

Asieh is a vigilant observer of the representations of modernism and, at times, the superficiality and absurdity of the modernized life style in Tehran. Her disgust at the showy upper class is specifically emphasized in her husband's friend's party where she decides to speak her mind and leave unexpectedly. Here Bayzai signifies the ostentation brought by the modernized forces that is to be shattered soon by the fuming power of the dominant lower class revolutionaries. These (religious) groups had a decisive role in the final outcome of revolution, as they were the ones who were humiliated and irritated by the Shah's imported modernization through his so-called White Revolution (Tohidi 256).

Hence, in the search for her identity, Asieh is not unaccompanied. In *The Crow* Asieh is one side of the triangle of Alam→ Asieh→ Esalat. These are the people who are lost and/or isolated in modernized Tehran. Asieh's husband, Aman Esalat – whose last name ironically means "noble birth" – is an adopted son of a wealthy lady who found him in a hospital while crying and "seeking refuge" – "Aman" in Persian. He is a TV anchor and reporter, infatuated with his new modernized lifestyle and with a shallow understanding of the current social situation. Esalat is involved in making a documentary about a number of missing people. Yet he represents a lost rootless self in a society with a state-imposed modernization. Ironically, he shares values with the corrupt society but fails to communicate with his wife. Esalat is shown as an extrovert character who exploits the language as a propagandist device. At the same time, his frequent lapses in presenting the news, as well as his failure to find a way to communicate with his wife and mother, bring a paradoxical absurdity reminiscent of Samuel Becket or Eugène Ionesco's characters.[11] He shows no interest in Alam and Asieh's physical and psychological search in the old Tehran and the past memories. Hence, Esalat is the legitimate son of this so-called modern society that lacks dignity and human decency. He makes fake documentaries that are "performed," is asked to "change the news if he doesn't like it," and let the host of the party search his pockets for the valuable jewel that went missing. Another paradoxical point in this film is the fact that while Esalat uses language as a profession and a means of communication, in many instances, he fails to express what he means. In contrast, Asieh, who works with the deaf students, easily understands them and successfully communicates with them. This is especially stressed when she narrates the story of the woodpecker and crow to

the students, by using sign language. Like the woodpecker in her story, Asieh is inquisitive for knowledge and stays aware of the world around her. Asieh resembles the bird in its search through the tree trunk; she is hurt and distressed but never stops her explorations.

Asieh's mother-in-law, Alam, is the third side of the triangle. She is an old dying woman in search of her lost youth. Her existence is split between a real place she seems to be living in and an imaginary city lost in memories. She does "not belong to Tehran but to *Tehran'i Qadīm* (the old Tehran)," she says, "a neighborhood lost for years." By the end of the film, the viewer realizes that she was the one who gave her picture as the missing person to the paper and makes the whole family up for the search. With the help of her daughter-in-law, she searches forgotten memories. The cold winter, the outcry of the crow, and her health situation metaphorically propose, "the philosophical dying of a society" as Bahar Irani suggests (329), and an era in the Iranian history which is, ironically, coincided with the occurrence of the Islamic revolution. Nevertheless, it is through Alam that Asieh develops the nostalgia for a past she never experienced. Like Ra'na in *The Stranger and the Fog*, Asieh lives in "an isolated, unstable, and unbalanced environment" as Naficy indicated, "but she is to achieve the balance only when she revaluates and unites with her past" (*Collection of Essays on Bayzai* 286).

Asieh is the only person among the three who waits for a new era to befall. The crisis of identity in her case causes a new cultural and philosophical discourse, or what Hoodashtian calls "new cultural compositions," that are the results of "a dynamic reconciliation between local traditions and the global modernity" (224). As

the viewer learns, Asieh is "probably" pregnant with child. This, figuratively, suggests her status as being informed by a change that conceives both awareness and crisis in her life. The following statement by Georges Lukac aptly describes Asieh's situation who resembles "the mythical person whose metaphysical security and freedom is unsettled once she is introduced to the new era" (qtd. in Hoodashtian 40). Her name is also reminiscent of the historical Asieh, the wife of the tyrant Pharaoh and the adopted mother of Moses, who rebelled against her husband to support Moses when he challenged his father and brother's authority to save the people of Israel. Like the historical Asieh, Asieh in the modern Tehran setting becomes an outsider to her society. Although Bayzai does not use deep focus frequently, by depicting Asieh in depth of field shots, her situation as a lonely stranger is highlighted. In her struggles against "[social] forms of domination …, against subjection [*assujettissement*] …, and submission" (Foucault 267), Asieh is not to be accompanied by her family who belong to the upper class society.

In contrast to Kiarostami or masters such as Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane* (1941) who preferred deep focus and wide-angle lenses, Bayzai chooses a more dramatic pattern of cutting, as well as shot/reverse-shot for dialogues. In most cases, in *The Crow*, for instance, the spectator does not have the "advantage" of a realist approach of seeing the whole thing through depth of focus. On the contrary, Bayzai presents a "canned theater" approach, to use Bazin's terminology (87), in which the events are shown from the spectators' eyes on the stage. Therefore, the camera, playing the role of spectators' eyes, remains subjective all through the film. This is reminiscent of Jean Cocteau's examination that views "cinema as an event seen

through a keyhole" (qtd. in Bazin 92). Through this keyhole, Bayzai presents the story of the Esalat family and their journey in search of their identities. As mentioned before, Asieh and Esalat are the ones who get involved in the search for the young woman, but it is only Alam who knows about the real identity of the woman. Asieh and the camera remain as outsiders and only learn the facts about the missing young woman, being Alam's youth, in the last sequence of the film.

In *The Crow* Bayzai endorses a dramatic approach towards cinema by remaining faithful to the subjective viewpoint of Asieh throughout the movie. The viewer of the film is not to learn the reality – objectively, in a classical cinematic fashion – until Asieh does. This theatrical approach, however, is fulfilled by cinematic techniques such as the classical pattern of montage, presenting dialogues in shot/reverse-shot formula, as well as through depicting most of the events in medium shots and medium close-ups that give the impression of seeing the story as on the stage. It is reminiscent of Bazin's examination of the editing in Cocteau's *Les parents terribles*, 1948, where the viewers' "rhythm of attention" (90) is in full harmony with the editing pace. For instance, in the scene where the camera focuses on a close-up of Asieh's hands mimicking a bird's flying, the director follows an "elementary syntax of interest" which is "the equivalent of concentration of attention" in a theater (Bazin 91).

By and large, Bayzai incorporates his stage aesthetics into the film *decoupage* in *The Crow*, most notably, through a subjective gaze in the case of the missing woman. Asieh's subjective gaze discovers the key to the mysterious closed chamber on Alam's necklace. When she enters the chamber, she finds the old family albums

and, among them, the picture of Alam that was identified as the young missing woman. It is only through this subjective gaze that Esalat becomes illuminated in terms of the real identity of his mother and Alam redefines her "self." Bayzai's use of screen techniques, such as editing and shot/reverse-shot dialogues, resembles Cocteau's style as Bazin examines it. According to Bazin, this employing of stage techniques on screen would enhance a theatrical approach in filmmaking:

> Instead of trying like so many others to dissolve it in cinema, on the contrary, [Cocteau] uses the resources of the camera to point up, to underline, to confirm the structure of the scenes and their psychological corollaries. The specific help given here by the cinema can only be described as an added measure of theatrical. (93)

Due to the coincidence of the revolutionary turmoil with the screening of *The Crow*, the film was not critically praised in 1978. Hence, *The Crow* represents Bayzai's meticulous observation of the current societal evolutions. This film envisioned the history of a lost nation that was suspended between an adopted modernization and a cultural past tended to be forgotten. Asieh stands as an example of a deterritorialized subject who tries to reshape the cultural discourses by imagining a new cultural space. Her alternative cultural space, allows for a recreating of the self and identity. Asieh as an individual is not trapped within the limited space of modernized projects, and the past is not eliminated. Metaphorically, Asieh migrates from the modern/ized real to the desired imaginary past to craft new identities that do not de-historicize the self. Asieh's real and imaginary travels to the old Tehran bring a productive and positive instability that engage the self in a dialogue with its history

and cultural past. It is both through Asieh's imagination and Bayzai's film, or cinema in a general sense, that the audience is drawn into a dialogue with a dynamic past that is able to refashion the reality of the present time. The screened memory in *The Crow* employs a "canned theater" approach to replace a national memory abandoned to the old neighborhoods that are already destroyed and the forgotten family albums. The cinematic memory of Bahram Bayzai in *The Crow* re-members and re-conceptualizes the Iranian identity.

It is the ambivalence of modern Iranian society that Bayzai brings into consideration in *The Crow*, as well as in his other films including *Bashu: The Little Stranger* and *Perhaps Some Other Time*. In *The Crow* the private interests of Asieh assume public significance, especially by Bayzai's highlighting the old and modern public spaces. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the political authorities, before and after the constitutional revolution, had a great impact in mobilizing modernity in the country, mostly through the modernized projects they had undertaken. Hence, the cultural systems that stem from popular forms of expression, including newspapers, literature, and visual arts, were important elements in the shaping and reshaping of modernity in Iran. *The Crow* suggests that imagining the nation and national identity in Iran should not be read merely through the ideological representation of the state power. On the other hand, the cultural systems should be taken into consideration as essential factors in the making of national identity. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* conceptualizes this notion where he indicates:

> The century of the Enlightenment, of rationalist secularism, brought with it its own modern darkness. . . . [Few] things were (are) suited to this end better than the idea of nation. If nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical', the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and . . . glide into a limitless future. What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being. (19)

While Bayzai pinpoints the significance of cultural systems, he does not let us forget the fact that, in the course of the time, cultural amnesia plays a role in what Homi Bhabha calls "the cultural temporality of the nation" which "inscribes a much more transitional social reality," because as Bhabha asserts: "[n]ations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time" (1). Asieh, by setting aside the comfort of social belonging, initiates a travel into the modern times, as well as the history, to unsettle this cultural amnesia in favor of bringing about a more profound discourse to the Iranian cultural life and the process of historical change. Bayzai's drawing on the national identity, however, could not be interpreted as a "nationalist" effort. The outsider in *The Crow* is celebrated as much as is the insider. The "in-between spaces"[12] of modernity and the past through which the Iranian self constructs his or her identity are depicted as equally important. Therefore, the seemingly national concerns in this film turn out to be universal concerns of modern communities. This recalls Homi Bhabha's statement that says: "National consciousness, which is not

nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension" (5). Bayzai's concerns in *The Crow* turn out to be to be universal concerns of the modern self, who is uprooted and deterritorialized by the redefining of cultural boundaries and limitations. In the next part of my dissertation, I examine Bayzai's films in the light of the crisis of identity and the birth of new cultural horizons in the "in-between spaces" of the modern discourse.

The Crisis of Identity: Birth of a New Rhizomatic Culture

In Bayzai's perspective, the modern Iranian subject is left with serious ontological questions, thus is at times confused and mystified. This uncertainty stems from the Iranians' encounter with the local and global modernity, especially after the Islamic revolution. According to scholars including Tavakoli-Targhi, cultural amnesia had an impact on Iranians' self-Orientalist approach towards historiography and the concepts of modernity and modernism. Thus, they were the *volunteer* subjects of "disenchantment," in Daryush Shayegan's terms, of modernized forces. The disenchanting projects set to "erase all representations of the magic and the mytho-poetic universe" (Shayegan, *Afsūn Zadigī* 13) in favor of a "modern" technological world. Hence, this erasure of the "familiar" world resulted in a crisis of identity. But this engagement with modernity, on both philosophical and practical levels, which lasted for more than two centuries, did not end in merely an unproductive crisis of identity.

The massive movements during the Islamic revolution – which were cultivated by national/Islamic/socialist theories of scholars such as Shari'ati – caused Iranians to revisit and reimagine the notions of "Western" modernity and the tasteless

modernization attempts of the Pahlavi regime that did not take into account national and religious viewpoints. Through the rethinking of selves and identities, Iranians constructed a new global modernity that is localized. In this locally adopted modernity, modern ideas and global facts are reconciled with the national history and identity. This reconciliation has caused multiple forms of modernity on, for instance, governmental and religious or secular and artistic levels of Iranian culture.

The confluence of modernity and the national history and traditions is explicitly evident in Bayzai's aesthetics. Bayzai's cinematic discourse represents that the crisis of identity was not an unfruitful incident. As already discussed in terms of *The Crow,* it gave birth to new cultural and philosophical discourses or what Hoodashtian calls "new compositions" (224). These new cultural compositions are the inevitable offshoots of the convergence of modernity and tradition. In this process of composing new cultural systems, the modern self shows resistance towards the disenchanting attempts of Western-style modernization in order to get engaged in a more creative procedure of "re-enchantment," as Shayegan puts it (*Afsūn Zadigī* 13), where the firm classical ontology is destroyed. Instead, a mosaic form of identity, informed by the cultural past as well as the modern values, takes the place of this classical ethos. Therefore, the Iranian self is now dealing with a plural identity resembling a bricolage. The refashioned Iranian self shows an uprooted, multi-layered identity that recalls Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomes. No "arborescent" culture or philosophy is able to comply with the endless questions of the modern self; this is why the Iranian culture responses to the question of modernity in a "rhizomatic" approach (Shayegan, *Afsūn Zadigī* 14).

In *Musāfirān* (*Travelers*, 1990), Bayzai showcases a multi-layered identity resembling a rhizomatic identity. The figures in *Travelers* move towards creating new conceptions to deal with contemporary issues. In the following discussion, I study the crisis of identity as represented in this film by using Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomes. My reading explores the questions of self and identity in *Travelers* at the metaphorical level. This is partly inspired by Bayzai's extensive portrayal of trees, and especially dying trees, both on the Caspian road and in Ma'arefis' house, which is reminiscent of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of uprooting trees in favor of a mosaic or rhizomatic culture that embraces a multi-layered identity. Moreover, my analysis draws on the cinematic techniques and, more specifically, their integration of the Western medium and the rhythm of *ta'zieh*. This integration indicates a new cultural composition, which embodies the continuation of an ever-changing modernity in Iranian society. In *Travelers*, Bayzai illustrates a number of individuals who are struggling with notions of life, death, happiness, and success. These characters are chosen from different social classes – a driver, middle class newly weds, a rural woman, a professor, and so forth. This fact suggests that the filmmaker has signified the crisis of identity in a variety of individual characters that represent the whole nation. Thus, Bayzai symbolically examines the crisis of identity at the national level.

The clash of the old order with the construing of a new bricolage is central to this movie with its symbolical and highly dramatized dialogues, such as the following episode that takes place between the bride (Mahrokh) and bridegroom (Rahi). In this sequence, the viewer sees the distorted image of Rahi in a broken mirror – the same

mirror that Mahrokh breaks when she learns about her sister's death. The next shot shows Rahi who is asking Mahrokh about their wedding rescheduling:

> Mahrokh: Impossible. We were supposed to be married in front of a mirror that is broken now.
>
> Rahi: Why should we break, then, Mahrokh? Why?

In the first sequence of *Travelers*, a mirror that reflects the sky – metaphorically referring to destiny and providence – is depicted in a close-up. The camera pans to show the mirror being moved to the car; in its reflection we see the gray barren forest and a rather big black car, resembling a coffin which is going to carry Mahtab and her family's dead bodies. Mahtab Ma'arefi, along with her children, Keivan and Keihan and her husband Heshmat Davaran are departing for Tehran to attend Mahrokh's wedding. The camera shows the cheerful boys playing outside, as Mahtab is doing the last minute arrangements in her house by the seashore.

Later, Mahtab is shown, while looking straight into the camera – a reminder of her awareness of her 'performance' – in a medium shot. Ironically, her conscious "performance" implies a realist approach here. She announces: "We are going to go to Tehran to attend my sister's wedding. But we are not going to reach there, we are all going to die." Still, having a smile on her face, she joins the rest in the car. Although this gesture looks rather Brechtian to those acquainted with Western literature, it is a direct borrowing from traditional Iranian plays. Here, as in many other occasions in the film, Bayzai draws on the conventions of *ta'zieh*. Similar to the beginning sequence in *Travelers*, in *ta'zieh* the narrator (usually being the same person as the director or *tazieh-gardān*) gives a brief summary of the whole tragic story before it is

to be played by the actors. Although this self-reflexive technique has a long history in both t*a'zieh* and *naaālī* as the two main forms of traditional Iranian theater, its practice in a film evokes a powerful and unique effect. The viewer, whom is shockingly being addressed, gets unusually engaged in the film and its events. Thus, Mahtab starts off a passion play.

It is the beginning of a *ta'zieh* story which is going to be played. This passion play, as Jahanbakhsh Nouraei postulates, is performed in four stages: "death, awaiting, mourning, and resurrection" (554). The family leave their house by the Caspian Sea to start their last journey. The car travels through a foggy, twisty road in a winter morning that resonates, once again, the dull setting of a *ta'zieh*. The Ma'arefi/Davaran family against a gray, gloomy, and leafless forest are shown in a set of dramatic traveling shots. This sequence of the film aestheticizes the concept of life that could, ironically, embrace death. A life that is short and tragic. Bayzai's paradoxical composition shows a happy family looking forward to attending their sister/aunt wedding. They have hired a chauffeur who is just about to change his profession in order to get settled in the city. Against this joyful ambiance, the camera moves to illustrate a foggy, leafless and gloomy road, which is to bring death to its travelers. Since the car accident or the bodies are not portrayed in the film, and the spectator merely sees a happy and hopeful family, this sequence, paradoxically, evokes a cheerful atmosphere. In this way, Bayzai artistically grafts death into life.

Mahtab "was" going to Tehran to attend her sister's wedding. Besides, she was supposed to bring the family mirror for Mahrokh's wedding ceremony. A mirror in a Persian wedding represents a good omen, light, and illumination.[13] It was, and still is

widely believed among Iranians that if the mirror breaks during the ceremony, bad luck looms over the marriage. In *Travelers*, the mirror also symbolically represents a family's history and identity, and is given to the new bride of the family to be kept until she hands it to the next bride. A symbol of fertility, continuity, and enlightenment, the mirror is passed from one female member of the family to the next, to endure a matriarchal tradition. But as Khanoum Bozorg says: "In the last wedding [the mirror] was lost. Mahtab found it among the rental shop's items. She searched everywhere until she found it. We decided then, that she should keep it herself." Thus, Mahtab becomes the guardian of the mirror, along with the good omen and enlightenment it brings. Mahtab is going to Tehran to, not only attend her sister's wedding, but also take the mirror for the ceremony. When Khanoum Bozorg is told of her death, she cannot believe it as she says: "This is impossible, she is supposed to bring the mirror for the wedding."

Mahtab, her sister Mahrokh, and their brother Mahoo, each have a tree in the garden of their house in Tehran. In a scene that shows the garden, the camera pans up from portraying the garden to a second floor window where Mahrokh stands. She indicates: "Mahtab's tree has died recently." The camera pans down to illustrate the dead tree in a garden filled with dead leaves in a winter day. In a set of parallel cuts, we see the black car and a trailer that are both smashed, only after the accident. The second cut shows the officer who is reporting the death of Mahtab's family, the driver and a rural woman who accompanied them in the middle of the way to receive fertility treatments in Tehran. The next parallel cut captures two different shots in Khanoum Bozorg's house: first Hekmat Davaran and then Mahoo who are informed of the

accident and their family's deaths. While the family in Tehran learns about Mahtab's death, we see the gardener examining the tree carefully, and when he makes sure the tree is dead, he ritualistically waters the tree – recalling the ritual before sacrificing an animal – and sorrowfully cuts it. In portraying the dead tree before Mahtab's death is announced, Bayzai draws on a metaphorical language that predicts a death. At the same time, the gardener's careful examination of the garden and his garden pruning promises a greener and livelier garden in the next spring.

Mahtab – meaning moonlight in Persian – coincidentally, alongside her tree dies. But her death, as Khanoum Bozorg indicates, is not the end, as "she died but didn't finish." This event is to shed light on and rejuvenate other people's lives. The tree dies, but we witness how hope blooms in people's hearts. It is through a death in *Travelers* that life is reshaped in a family. Mahtab's death is a reminder for each and every member of this family to revisit life and redefine his or her identity. This is symbolically shown in the last sequence, when Mahtab – who is dead – appears to bring the mirror. The reflection of the mirror enlightens people's faces.

In this sequence, which is the last one of the film, a group of people is gathered in Ma'arefi's guest room in the first floor for the mourning ceremony. All of them, except Khanoum Bozorg are wearing black. The setting is dramatically dark and depressing. A traveling shot portrays the visitors, members of the family, and the six empty chairs in the middle of the room. They are left unoccupied in honor of the six people who died in the car accident. A second traveling shot quickly pans up to portray Mahrokh in a wedding dress. The crowd stop crying as they are shocked. Instead they cheer for the bride. In the opposite direction, the camera shows Mahtab,

her family, the chauffeur, and the rural woman who died in the car. Mahtab is holding the mirror, which is spectacularly shining. The reflection of the mirror's light illuminates each person's face in the room. This is shown in another traveling shot that ultimately zooms in Mahrokh's face that is coming downstairs. Her face is magically illuminated. At this time, Khanoum Bozorg smiles with satisfaction. Although Mahtab (moonlight) is dead, she succeeds to transfer the mirror, light, productivity, and good omen to the next generation of Ma'arefi daughters.

This magical realist sequence not only endorses an innovative energy to this film – and Bayzai's aesthetics in general – but also reestablishes contact with Iranian traditions temporarily eclipsed by the realist body of film and literature. In Zoroastrian mythology, the last five days of the Iranian year (from the twenty sixth to the thirtieth of Esfand) are called *gathanik* in which the dead (*farurs*) come from the *farurs*' world to visit their living family members. They descend to this world to participate in the New Year's joyful preparations. If their family members call them, they offer help as well. According to Zoroastrianism, during the *gathānīk* days, the house should be kept clean and peaceful. As Hussein Ghana'at indicates, Bayzai may have had this ceremony in mind when he decided to incorporate the magical realist scene into the film (576). In Islamic mythology, Iranians celebrate a similar event in the birth date of the twelfth Imam, Mahdi, who is, according to Shi'a Muslims, occulted for five hundred years now. On the particular day, which is called *baraat*, people visit cemeteries, pray for their dead, and give food and money to the poor. It is based on the belief that the dead are waiting to be paid a visit on this specific day. This infusion of Zoroastrian/Islamic mythology and cinema evokes a magical realist situation.

Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris define magical realism as:

> [a] supernatural [account that] is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an every day occurrence – admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism. Magic is no longer quixotic madness, but normative and normalizing. It is a simple matter of the most complicated sort. (3)

In a similar way, the arrival of Mahtab and the turning of mourning into a wedding ceremony are portrayed as an ordinary matter, if not an obvious one. This is perfectly accepted by other characters, and well integrated into narrative. At the same time, it does disrupt the narrative to make it aesthetically more dynamic. The disruption of the narrative, shockingly at the end, suggests a cultural disruption. It makes the spectators "scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, [and] motivation" (Zamora and Faris 3).

Mahtab's death and the dying of her tree suggest the end of, what Deleuze and Guattari call, the "arborescent" form. In a family entangled by conventions, the concept of the self seems to be firm and unchanged. No one has dared to examine the question of identity. Metaphorically, the characters all resemble trees rooted in the same spot. Mahrokh deeply believes in what destiny has to offer her. Her puppet-like gestures are reminiscence the traditional puppetry or *arūsak bāzī*. Mahrokh signifies a puppet in the hands of predestination. Her comment on the power of fate and destiny reinforces this idea. When Munes complains that in her era everything was more proper in a wedding, Mahrokh replies: "It was not my decision to be born now." Mahoo and Mastan are doomed to have a disabled child whom they visit only once a

month. Hekmat and Hamdam are suffering an unhappy marriage. They have never experienced love in their relationship and now, after the death of his brother and his two sons, Hekmat sees himself as the last Davaran because his two daughters "are going to bear somebody else's name once married," he says. Nonetheless, they do not have the power to change the course of their lives.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari announce: "We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much" (15). In a similar fashion, Bayzai, fed up with watching the giant trees of carefully constructed cultural conventions and thought, proposes a mosaic form of identity that resembles Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic perspective. Metaphorically, Mahtab's tree dies to give life to a rhizome-like and open existence. Afterwards, Mahrokh and other members of the family are not to be bound to their fixed points of origin. Their identities depict a multi-layered structure, or in Deleuze and Guattari's term, a "nomadic" assemblage challenging the established conceptions. The travelers are gone, despite Khanoum Bozorg's disbelief, but the rest of the family inaugurate a journey from "being" to "becoming." They grow into rhizomes to embrace the most liberated moments of their lives:

> The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be", but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and... and... and" This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be." Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions. Making a clean slate, starting or beginning from ground

> zero, seeking a beginning or a foundation—all imply false conception of voyage and movement. (Deleuze and Guattari 25)

However, when they first learn about Mahtab's death, their initial reaction is the "appropriate" response of a family who lost a loved one. Being a professor who is trained in a systematic school of thought, and relying heavily on his observations and empirical skills, Mahoo is the first person in the family who "believes," although painfully, the bad news. He is in the rental shop to borrow wedding items when he learns about the news from Hekmat, who is making phone calls to verify the accident. Mahoo, on the other hand, does not wait for the verification. He decides, immediately, that the wedding pieces – including a curtain of Khosrow and Shirin's love story – should to be replaced with mourning pieces – among them, a curtain which shows the resurrection scene, another reference to a *ta'zieh*. When he faces Khanoum Bozorg's denial, he brings first hand evidence to the accident, a police officer. Mahoo and the police officer are the representatives of a pure rational wisdom, believing what they see with their physical eyes. The policeman affirms that Mahtab and her family are dead. He adds: "We carefully examined the accident thirty seconds after it happened, nothing escapes our meticulous observation." Ironically, however, when the grandmother asks him about the mirror, he has to admit that he did not see it.

It is only the grandmother who reacts "irrationally" following Mahtab's death. The people who come to pay their tribute assume she is behaving like a schizophrenic. She strongly believes that even though Mahtab is dead now, she is not finished. Khanoum Bozorg still waits for them to come back and bring the mirror for Mahrokh's wedding. She acts schizophrenically as she denies the binary logic of

life/death or what Deleuze and Guattari called "the logic of the either-or" (26). In her mind, the binary logic fades away to bring forth a multiplicity of "schizoanalysis" "where the emphasis is on [...] the egoless production of what is irreducible to a structure of a resemblance or an identity, for which Deleuze and Guattari use the term 'becoming'" (Lucy 198).

"Becoming" for these two philosophers, is anti-fascist because it refuses the opposition of being and non-being. By the same token, Bayzai employs the creative force of 'becoming' in Khanoum Bozorg's characterization who scrambles all the conventional codes of identity. In this way, Mahtab's non-organic life emerges in the family's imagination and uproots the linear longstanding trees of conventions; it is an abstract life based on the affirmation of "coming and going rather than starting and finishing" (Deleuze and Guattari 25). Khanoum Bozorg takes the lead to introduce the new possibilities of a circular approach to identity in her family.

Individually but collectively, people in *Travelers* develop new meanings of voyage, movement, and identity. They move from the logic of "to be" to the logic of "AND" to add up new horizons in their life. The fact that this film does not center on the actions of one leading character enriches the multi-layered and de-centered approach Bayzai takes in making it. It is the story of the people who collectively and thus ritualistically,[14] grow new identities rooted in multiple origins.

Although we are dealing with one omniscient camera, the story is told from several perspectives to enlighten the psychological struggles each of them have in the process of rediscovering their selves. The camera movements play an important role in conveying this approach. Quite frequently, the camera pans up and down, or

horizontally, to focus from one actor to another to change the point of view. For instance, in a set of traveling shots, the viewer sees the wedding preparations in Ma'arefi's house. First, Rahi is portrayed with a bouquet of flowers in the street by his car. He is shown while throwing the flowers up. The camera follows the bouquet as Mahrokh grabs in from the window upstairs. They talk about wedding preparations and Mahtab's arrival. Then another camera, set on Hekmat's dashboard, shows Rahi. He is almost hit by Hekmat's car. Next, Hakmat and his wife Hamdam are shown greeting Rahi. A shot from Mahrokh's point of view illustrates, in a low angle shot, Rahi's car starting and then driving in the street. The camera pans up to portray a symmetrical view of two rows of golden trees alongside the street. This is cut to the next shot that shows Mahrokh as she closes the windows while humming a song. A second camera from the opposite side of the room illustrates Mahrokh's point of view as she turns towards the door: the open door of her room and an enframed image of a handrail that moves to a low angle shot of downstairs. In the next shot, the viewer sees Hamdam and her husband, Hekmat, and Khonoum Bozorg in the hall. When Hamdam leaves the room, Hekmat is portrayed when he walks in a half circle, talking about the advantages of destroying this large house to make it into an apartment complex. He adds that: "His Company can handle the rebuilding." The camera moves fast to leave Hekmat in the corner of the shot. A long-focal-length lens – that pushes the characters to the same plane – takes both this scene and the former one. Now Mastan is in the center of focus, responding to Hekmat: "Now that we have a wedding, I think you can come up with a better idea than destroying this house." Afterwards, Mastan leaves the camera frame. Since the long-focal-length lens flattens depth, in this sequence,

Hekmat and Mastan's movements in half circles take more time to cover what should be small distances. Besides, the use of a telephoto shot makes the figures seem closer to one another. The dramatic effect of using this lens enhances the idea of collectivity and the director's ritualistic approach.[15] The camera moves once again to show Khanoum Bozorg who says: "Don't talk about destruction. Have a *shirini* (sweet), instead." A fast cut abrupts the scene to a shot of Mahrokh with the bouquet, seating on one of the chairs beside Khanoum Bozorg. She says: "I hope Mahtab likes these flowers [that I ordered for her room]." The camera pans up, once again, to capture Munes and her husband's image upstairs. They are coming down the stairs while Munes is cheering for the bride. This is a typical scene of Bayzai's employing of a theatrical approach, enhanced by fast camera movements and fast editing, which informs the whole film.

The use of fast editing, camera movements and traveling shots thwarts a single and centralized perspective. These traveling shots make a harmonious balance between the two senses of the "communal" versus "individual" identities that are ongoing issues in the modern societies. The characters' collective evolution brings a sense of ritual performance. Like any other ritual, the family's problematization of their identities signifies, as Bayzai indicates in terms of rituals, "a collective act of creation" (in Dabashi, *Close Up* 78). Collectively and ritualistically, these characters create new concepts in the path to understand the notions of self and identity. Like other rituals that convey universal meanings, this communal struggle proposes a universal connotation to the film that could bypass national borders. Hence, *Travelers*, empowered by cultural conventions of a certain nationality, could be seen as a

universal concern not bounded to a specific socio-political borderline. At the same time, the monologues performed by each character – also recalling the conventional monologues in *ta'zieh* – reveal each person's unique questions and struggles. The monologues, de-centered as they are, are a means to the discovery of these people's hidden sides. These monologues are also worth considering in terms of Bayzai's deconstruction of a pure visual language. In *Travelers*, the usual visual focus of cinema is deconstructed in favor of representing an intermingling of verbal and visual modes by employing a metaphorical, elaborate, and sophisticated language the characters use in the course of the film.

The wedding ceremony, which turns into a mourning that is turning once more into Mahrokh's wedding, becomes the cause of these people's rethinking and re-defining of their lives in the movie. Mastan is now thinking of adopting a girl, to be named after Mahtab. Hekmat, after sharing his thoughts with his wife about the sorrow of not having a boy to bear his name, is now re-examining his life. Watching the two girls playing around, he seeks forgiveness from Hamdam: "Please ignore what I said. I felt blue, I just felt blue all of a sudden." They are not to be bound or colonized by their old beliefs any more. Their identities can fly in different domains or territories to re- and de-territorialize their selves. The excessive camera movements in a set of seemingly non-ending traveling and panning shots are philosophical rather than cinematic achievements when Bayzai ventures into new aesthetico-philosophical territories. It could be argued that the unconventional style of framing, editing, camera movements, and the use of telephoto lens signify unconventional meanings the filmmaker proposes.

In *Travelers*, the characters/textual elements, the narrator/omniscient camera, and the spectators are masterfully interrelated and interwoven. In a similar fashion, notions of life and death are deterritorialized to represent these concepts as interrelated ideas not to be separated. This idea is evident in the film on the plot level, which travels from mourning and death to wedding and rebirth, as well as via the musical choice of the film, composed by Babak Amini that moves from mourning tunes to joyful tunes to convey both the life's pleasure and death's sorrows simultaneously. The lighting is another element shifting from gloomy to bright depending on the context. The rhizomatic extensions of Bayzai's thought de-centralized the narrative to create new conceptions which challenge the philosophical truth in the presence of (im)possible worlds. Mahtab's rebirth is represented as the emergence of multiple new identities in other characters as Mahoo indicates in the last sequence:

> We should not call it a mourning ceremony, as this is not their end. They remain through our memories and their influence [on us]. They used to exist in separate bodies but now they are living in our minds. We are gathering here to celebrate their new existence. So please leave those six seats in their tribute. This is their families' request and the natural right of those we gathered for.

The fast camera movements symbolically refer to the selves and identities as dynamic conceptions. Bayzai's stylistic approach in *Travelers* reminds the viewer that although traditions survive over generations, they continually change and evolve. Bayzai's artistic conjunction of the death of roots with the birth of rhizomes creates a bricolage of new identities in this film. The self escapes the limits of the totalizing

cultural space to become a deterritorialized and liberated individual. Paradoxically, through representing the themes of death and predestination, Bayzai brings about ideas on life and identity. In Bayzai's filmmaking, a modern medium (cinema) is juxtaposed with the conventions of the past to connote a sense of continuity. In *The Crow* the sense of displacement, in the case of Asieh, turns into mobility. Similarly, in *Travelers* the feeling of rootless-ness of figures such as Golrokh and Mastan brings liberation. The process of modernism displaced these people. The connection with the past, however, makes their lives meaningful. These thematic concerns are visualized by Bayzai's exclusive aesthetic sensibilities with his special setups, camera work, sound effects, music, and the multiplicity of characters, which resonate with the conventions of *ta'zieh*.

In both *The Crow* and *Travelers*, which were examined in this chapter, modern concepts stretch the boundaries of the nation to embrace a deterritorialized world where the local enters a global space. Hence, in the process of uprooting the selves and identities, as Bayzai's thematic and stylistic preoccupations depict, the Iranian self makes a "conscious choice," in Arjun Appadurai's words (44), by re-examining and exploiting both the local and global philosophies and aesthetic sensibilities. Bayzai's choice of traditional visual arts as the aesthetic backbone to his cinematic syntax takes an ironical turn if we consider the fact that *ta'zieh* was banned, by the Pahlavi government, for several years due to its so-called backward values. Other forms of traditional visual arts, such as *kheimeh shab bazi*, were also abandoned during these years in favor of popularizing Hollywood and local commercial movies (the *filmfarsi)* in Iran. However, these popular arts, and the philosophy behind them, were not to be

erased from the collective psyche. In the realm of cinema, Bayzai, as the most visually literate director in the country, revived and remembered these traditions in his yet modernist approach. The next chapter explores Bayzai's filmmaking as an attempt to historicize both the displaced subject and the mythological milieu through which the concept of modernity has been re-imagined.

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[1] For a more detailed discussion on this subject refer to Jamshid Behnam's *Iranian va Andishe-ye Tajadod* (*The Iranians and the Concept of Modernization*, 1996).

[2] "Nasser o-din shah's son and successor, Muzaffar ad Din (1896-1907), was a weak and ineffectual ruler who was facing royal extravagance and the absence of incoming revenues exacerbated financial problems. The shah quickly spent two large loans from Russia, partly on trips to Europe. Public anger fed on the shah's propensity for granting concessions to Europeans in return for generous payments to him and his officials. People began to demand a curb on royal authority and the establishment of the rule of law as their concern over foreign, and especially Russian, influence grew.

The shah's failure to respond to protests by the religious establishment, the merchants, and other classes led the merchants and clerical leaders in January 1906 to take sanctuary from probable arrest in mosques in Tehran and outside the capital. When the shah reneged on a promise to permit the establishment of a "house of justice," or consultative assembly, 10,000 people, led by the merchants, took sanctuary in June in the compound of the British legation in Tehran. In August the shah was forced to issue a decree promising a constitution. In October an elected assembly convened and drew up a constitution that provided for strict limitations on royal power, an elected parliament, or Majlis, with wide powers to represent the people, and a government with a cabinet subject to confirmation by the Majlis. The shah signed the constitution on December 30, 1906. He died five days later. The Supplementary Fundamental Laws approved in 1907 provided, within limits, for freedom of press, speech, and association, and for security of life and property. According to scholar Ann K.S. Lambton, the Constitutional Revolution marked the end of the medieval period in Iran. The hopes for constitutional rule were not realized, however.

Muzaffar ad Din's successor, Mohammad Ali Shah, was determined to crush the constitution. After several disputes with the members of the Majlis, in June 1908 he used his Russian-officered Persian Cossacks Brigade to bomb the Majlis building, arrest many of the deputies, and close down the assembly. Resistance to the shah, however, coalesced in Tabriz, Esfahan, Rasht, and elsewhere. In July 1909, constitutional forces marched from Rasht and Esfahan to Tehran, deposed the shah, and reestablished the constitution. The ex-shah went into exile in Russia.

Although the constitutional forces had triumphed, they faced serious difficulties. The upheavals of the constitutional revolution and civil war had undermined stability and trade. In addition, the ex-shah, with Russian support, attempted to regain his throne, landing troops in July 1910. Most serious of all, the hope that the constitutional revolution would inaugurate a new era of independence from the great powers ended when, under the Anglo-Russian

Agreement of 1907, Britain and Russia agreed to divide Iran into spheres of influence. The Russians were to enjoy exclusive right to pursue their interests in the northern sphere, the British in the south and east; both powers would be free to compete for economic and political advantage in a neutral sphere in the center. Matters came to a head when Morgan Shuster, a United States administrator hired as treasurer general by the Persian government to reform its finances, sought to collect taxes from powerful officials who were Russian protégés and to send members of the treasury gendarmerie, a tax department police force, into the Russian zone. When in December 1911 the Majlis unanimously refused a Russian ultimatum demanding Shuster's dismissal, Russian troops, already in the country, moved to occupy the capital. To prevent this, on December 20 Bakhtiari chiefs and their troops surrounded the Majlis building, forced acceptance of the Russian ultimatum, and shut down the assembly, once again suspending the constitution. There followed a period of government by Bakhtiari chiefs and other powerful notables".

The information regarding Iranian Constitutional Revolution is quoted from The Library of Congress Country Studies. http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cstdy:1:./temp/~frd_OK22 (April 22, 2006). For a detailed account of the Iranian constitutional revolution refer to Janet Afary's *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism*. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.

[3] By highlighting the impact of Khomeini's leadership, I do not intend to underestimate the role of Iranian religious modernists, known as Nehzat-e Azadi-ye Iran, or Liberation Movement of Iran, under the leadership of Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani. As H.E. Chehabi pinpoints, the LMI activities dates back to at least 1953, back in the Mosaddegh era. As a popular party in 1953-63, LMI "advocated a bigger role for religion in society, whereas now [as a gesture of their dissatisfaction with the official clergy] they warn against religious dogmatism and intolerance" (Chehabi 306). But in any case, it was Imam Khomeini's ideology of combat that ultimately took precedence over Bazargan and Taleghani's modernist and moderate theocracy.

[4] Edward Said who was a leading critic of Orientalism, paradoxically wrote about the "unequal development of Orientalism and its nemesis, Europology" (Tavakoli-Targhi 18). In his *Orientalism*, said speculates that the East barely made any attempt to get to know the West from a systematic point of view. In a Saidian perspective, the East encountered Western modernity through embracing and not analyzing it.

5 For more on this topic refer to the second chapter of *A Short History of the Movies* by Gerald Mast and Bruce Kawin, pages 8-27.

6 As it is also indicated in both M. Ali Issari's *Cinema in Iran 1900-1979* (30), and *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7 (792), the date of the first film taken in Iran is mentioned 1895 – a documentary taken from Mozaffar o-din Shah's Coronation by a certain Russi Khan—but since this film does not exist and is not even mentioned in Mozaffar o-din Shah's memoir, Issari and Jamal Omid, among other film critics concluded not to support this claim while Peter Avery has mentioned both of these dates. In most documents on the history of the Iranian cinema filmmaking in Iran is mentioned to be initiated in 1900.

[7] This could be either the modern ideas of the past that was embraced by Western scholars and scientists (such as algebra, astronomy and so forth) or through employing non-Western scholars who immigrated to Western countries, especially during the second half of the twentieth century and on ward.

[8] Although this is not related to my discussion, it could be argued that Western cultures, in the wake of the modern era, have undergone a similar phase of change to accommodate tradition and modernity.

9 Among other artistic forms of expression that disallowed the centralization of the self and body are the traditional painting (Iranian miniature painting) and sculpture. Prior to the emergence of Iranian modern art forms, the representation of human body was prohibited because of religious restrictions. Besides, in the traditional miniature painting, the perspective, which is an important element in the Western realist painting, is absent. Instead of focusing on the art forms that concentrate on human body and perspective, the traditional Iranian arts, as opposed to Western art forms, took a more abstract form represented by artistic expressions such as calligraphy and tile painting.

10 I have borrowed this term from Protestantism's infamous message that is based on individuality and the humans' "liberated spirit" (Hoodashtian 138-41).

11 Here, there is an interesting opposition compared to what happens in *Bashu, the Little Stranger* where Nai' and Bashu, who do not share a common language, accomplish to communicate to one another. As Nasrin Rahimieh illuminates, "[T]he woman" or Nai' "and the stranger", being Bashu "need each other to unsettle the beliefs and customs of an established community. They must together become the outsider, the embodiment of the other side of the self, in order to put the self and the other into dialogue with each other. That such a dialogue must cut across ethnic and linguistic boundaries is underlined in the film's juxtaposition of Persian, Arabic, and Gilaki"(250). In *The Crow*, on the contrary, Esalat, Asieh, and Alam, among other people we encounter share Persian as the native language but fail to communicate. The situation is *Bashu* is closer to the way Asieh and her deaf students fully communicate by using the sign language.

12 This term is adopted from Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*, (p. 4).

13 It should be noted that light versus darkness is a seminal concept in the Iranian collective memory. It signifies the constant battle of Zoroastrian Ahura/God that symbolized the light, with Ahriman or the darkness.

14 Bayzai's film grammar employs a ritualistic approach. Ritual is a communal--instead of a singular—exercise and any ritual involves a group of people. *Travelers*, with a de-centering approach, takes on a ritualistic form. Bayzai's highlighting of rituals is emphasized by him in many instances including in Dabashi's interview with the director.

[15] In another scene, when Hamdam calls Mastan to tell her about the car accident, the use of telephoto lens brings the characters closer to one another. When the old black phone rings very loudly, the camera is set behind the phone to portray it dramatically huge, almost taking the whole screen. Mastan, Khanoum Bozorg, and Mahrokh are portrayed in the background by a telephoto lens. The scene is virtually two-dimensional and the figures look blurry but in the same plane. When Mastan answers the phone, Khanoum Bozorg, Munes, and Mahrokh are portrayed by a telephoto shot, against the backdrop of a huge black phone. The looming, even horrifying presence of the black phone in an extreme close-up and the portrayal of the figures via telephoto lens puts these people on the same plane, metaphorically suggesting the fear that they share.

Chapter Four

Mirroring the Past, Screening the Present, Dreaming the Future

Introduction

Recovering forgotten history is one of the main themes in Bahram Bayzai's aesthetics. In order to mobilize the historical themes in his films, Bayzai employs an allegorical film structure. Bayzai's films, especially those made after 1974, are charged with a mythological language and highly metaphorical meanings. Thus these films are usually described as difficult to comprehend (Eshghi 288 and Akrami 295). Paradoxically, they are very popular among Iranian filmgoers. For instance, Bayzai's latest film, *Sag-Kushi* (*Dog-Eat-Dog* 2001), a box office success in 2001, got the People's Choice Award in the Nineteenth International Fajr Film Festival. Because of the censoring measures exercised by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Ershad-e Eslami)*, Bayzai has not been allowed to make any films after that. However, his recent play, *Majlis'i Shabīh: dar Zikr'i Masā'ib'i Ustād Mākān va Hamsarash Rukhshīd Farzīn* (*The Tragedy of Professor Makan and His Wife, Rokhshid Farzin: A Passion Play*, 2005), with similar historical implications, was the most profitable play in the history of Iranian theater. One reason for this popularity could be the fact that identifying with the past is a determining concept that informs the Iranians' modern identities. In other words, the construction of the modern Iranian self and individuality is based on a nationally conscious identity. In the shaping of this modern national identity, modern historiographical works and historical studies have had a significant impact. In a similar fashion, Bayzai's aesthetics raises questions

about the modern self and identity and reactivates Iranian collective memory. This is a cause for Bayzai's popularity among Iranian spectators. Bayzai's films are charged with a mythological language and historical implications that make the spectator revisit history. My discussion in this chapter concentrates on Bayzai's re-historicizing of the past to problematize the status quo. It explores Bayzai's reusing and refashioning of the conventions of Iranian visual and performing arts and cultural myths. Furthermore, it examines the director's reframing of concepts such as past, present, and identity by dislocating the written or formal history, underlining private spaces, and highlighting the history and culture of the past.

Refashioning Iranian history in the modern era is not merely a twentieth century phenomenon. On the contrary, it dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Persian texts such as *Shāhnāmih* were reread and reviewed for shaping new national identities. As Tavakoli-Targhi states:

> In the emerging Iran-time, the mythical tempos of *Dāsatir*, *Dabistan-i Mazahib*, *Sharistan*, and *Shāhnāmih* increasingly *displaced* the sacred time of Islam. Reading and (re)citing these Iran-glorifying texts in a period of societal dislocation, military defeats, and foreign infiltration during the nineteenth century allowed for the rearticulation of Iranian identity and the construction of alternative forms of historical narrations and periodizations. The authorization and popular (re)citation of these narratives resulted in a process of cultural *transference* that intensified the desire for a recovery of the "forgotten history" of ancient Iran. (97)

Through reviving Zoroastrian and Persian texts that replaced the established Islamic texts, the national identity in Iran was altered in the modern era. The globo-Islamic identity, a crucial and decisive scheme in the Islamic empire that pronounced all its citizens as a unified nation (*ommat*) was to be changed by a more regional/national discourse, based on Iranian identity.

However, the common trait in both the Islamic and nationalist accounts of identity-construction is their construing of a coherent, homogeneous, and unified history. In both the Islamic and Iranian accounts of history, history is treated as a rigid and unchanging sequence of events. For instance, whether these historical and artistic texts have portrayed the biblical Adam or the Zoroastrian Kiumarth as the first human being, in both cases a monological cultural explanation, based on fixed propositions that celebrate one culture or another, is sustained. This self-glorifying approach to history still informs the making of a number of Iranian historiographical texts and art productions (in both government-funded and private sectors). Bayzai's refashioning of the history, however, is different from these nationalist and Islamist interpretations in the sense that his aesthetics problematizes the "established" aspects of the Iranian culture and history.

In Bayzai's films, one could hardly find a coherent and homogenous world based on a monological perspective.[1] For instance, as I discuss later in this chapter, the space in his films does not merely represent the real place. On the contrary, space in Bayzai's films is a diverse notion that refers to the imaginative and realist ambiances in the present or historical times. Therefore, the concept of space shows a dialogical multiplicity that is uprooted by Bayzai's novel imagistic and historical

approach. In their search for identity, the figures portrayed in his films are similarly deterritorialized as they challenge the established cultural and societal beliefs.[2]

Moreover, Bayzai's re-evaluation of the history – as opposed to both the Islamic-oriented accounts and the nationalist narratives – does not rely on formal texts. His films are based on mythology and history. Yet, Bayzai's films are not directly informed by Persian canonical texts like *Shāhnāmih* or the central Islamic texts such as *The Qur'an*. On the contrary, Bayzai's aesthetics delves into popular artistic conventions like Iranian theatrical traditions. In addition, as I mentioned in chapter three, in Bayzai's films, examining issues from subjective and personal perspectives takes precedence over probing social issues such as war or national history. The social issues stay as the background, while the people's journey of personal growth is highlighted. In almost all of his films and plays, a private story about ordinary individuals takes precedence over historical and social matters. The presence of Bayzai's conscious exploring and highlighting of the private stories overpowers the importance of socio-historical themes.

Whether he tackles a historical-oriented notion like the one in *Marg'i Yazd-gird* (*The Death of Yazd-gird*, 1983), or a very personal matter as portrayed in *The Crow*, Bayzai does not limit his cinematic gaze to representing "facts" from any particular viewpoint – such as from a national or religious perspective. On the contrary, his films are about humans and could be applied to humanity in its broadest sense. Therefore, Bayzai's cinematic historicizing of the forgotten self is a different story that needs to be addressed in a detailed fashion. In the ensuing discussion, I explore Bayzai's *Perhaps Some Other Time*, in which historicizing the self plays a

crucial role in Kiyan's reconstruction of her identity. Through portraying Kiyan's searching, the viewer faces the questions of remembering, forgetting, and alienation.

Historicizing the Forgotten Subject

In his filmmaking, Bayzai perpetuates a constant dialogue with the historical and cultural systems in order to redefine the notions of modern self and identity. In his films, history and identity are treated as intertwined conceptions. Thus, the spectator finds that getting to know the self equals searching history. The leading characters, usually women, are graceful and dominating figures, nonetheless, in their search for identity, they are to revisit their historical past. In the process of recovering memory and through the recurring themes of time and space, *Perhaps Some Other Time* invites the viewer to re-member and to reconsider history.

A pregnant woman who is struggling with bitter memories of the past and a psychological illness, Kiyan finds out that she is not the biological child of her parents. In a search to find her true identity, she has to investigate orphanages and the birth archives. When she does not find a satisfying answer, Kiyan ends up searching through her memories and family albums. Finally, she finds her answer, not in the documented files, but in Vida's home and her albums, places far from the official documented history but close to home in less formal and private spaces.

Kiyan's husband, Moddaber, is involved in making documentary films for the national television broadcaster. Modabber is introduced to the viewer in a studio, where he is working on dubbing a documentary about pollution. Bayzai aestheticizes this sequence with highly metaphorical and suggestive images. The room is barely lit. Against this backdrop, we see fragmented images from the old Tehran on the screen.

Then Modabber is shown in front of the screen talking to his wife on the phone. The pictures that embellish the background of this scene portray an elegant and tranquil city with wide streets, trees, and the recognizable architecture of the nineteenth century Iran. However, the images of the old Tehran inserted in the documentary are just paintings, not "real" photographs. The fragmented montage continues to contrast the old and elegant Tehran with the modern Tehran, which has jammed streets and unattractive condensed apartment complexes in medium to far shots. Traffic lights, exhaust pipes, a baby in a stroller, and the tire of the stroller are portrayed through close ups and extreme close ups. A few workers with masks are depicted in a very polluted setting. The images of the workers and the editing group in the studio are shown through the shot/reverse-angle shots. Modabber indicates that this scene seems extremely "unreal" for a documentary because the smoke is not real. Paradoxically, his colleague informs him that this is the only real smoke they managed to shoot. The whole scene problematizes what is portrayed as reality, whether in documentaries or other forms of documentation. Particularly, it depicts the manipulative practices exercised in the process of making "documentaries".

In a shot that is shown on the screen in the studio, Modabber locates a woman looking remarkably like Kiyan, who rides with a strange man in a red car. He loses his concentration and fails to dub in the film. Since he cannot continue the work, the crew has to postpone the job for the next day. Modabber, however, does not leave the studio. He is determined to recover the truth regarding the strange man whom he saw, in the film, with his wife. Paradoxically, Modabber and his colleagues discontinue dubbing in the film, or in other words, "adding" to the filmed "reality" now. Instead,

they are to find the "unedited" film stock in order to see the whole sequence that was "elided" through editing. Thus, Bayzai suggests the existence of a different layer of reality, where the "facts" are not eliminated or added through editing and dubbing. In this way, the viewer is led to question both the reliability of a filmed event – documentary and fiction alike – and the accountability of the extant historical accounts, in a broader sense.

The dubbing is suspended and most of the crew leave for the day. Modabber returns to the room. He watches the same scene over and over to find the plate number of the red car. But he is not successful in this regard. In a set of matching cuts, we see Kiyan who looks at the street through a window upstairs. The low angle shots illustrate a windy and cloudy autumn day. Through the window – in shot/reverse-angle shots – Kiyan watches people on the street. The golden leaves, falling in a cloudy day, bring a melancholic aura to the film. In a medium shot Modabber is shown calling his wife but when Kiyan answers the phone, he remains silent. In the scenes that portray Modabber, the pictures of the old city are still in the background. Then the camera moves to foreground – although still in a medium shot – these pictures of the old city. This sequence that started with images of old Tehran, aesthetically, finishes with the same images. Thus, Bayzai's editing of the closing sequence parallels and repeats the beginning scene, but with the positions reversed. By employing this technique, the sequence that was started with pictures of the old city on the screen ends with pictures of the old city on the wall. In the opening scene of the sequence, the pictures of the old Tehran were used (in the documentary) to mobilize the focus of the documentary about the present situation. In the closing scene, the

same pictures of the past are highlighted to emphasize the modern humans' ties to their past. Modabber lives and works in the present, nevertheless, recovering the past opens a new chapter in his life. In this manner, *Perhaps Some Other Time*, which began with the present time turns its cinematic focus on the objects from the past and history.

Modabber suspects Kiyan, thereafter, of having an affair with another man. Kiyan's distrustful behavior, resulting from the new findings regarding her true identity, a psychological illness, and her pregnancy that she hides from her husband, merely stirs Modabber's suspicion. From this moment on, Kiyan and Modabber's relationship falls into a stage where everything looks dubious. In order to know about his wife's in/fidelity, Modabber has no other venue but to search in his film stocks. It seems that these highly constructed documentaries are the closest he can get to the reality.

Kiyan's nightmarish dreams are portrayed through Bayzai's masterful accelerated blue-tinted montage. The excessive camera movements, jump cuts, and the lighting, which varies from gloomy and dark to extremely lit scenes, have a disorientating effect and emphasize a state of extreme instability. As Kiyan searches and finds more about her past, the dreams occur more frequently and with more details. Through the montage techniques such as editing fragmented images, rapid traveling shots, and fading the spectacle enters an expressionistic space in which Kiyan duels with her nightmarish memories and a dual identity.

In a blue-lit scene, Kiyan is shown on her bed sleeping but apparently she is struggling with bad dreams. A fast traveling shot visualizes Modabber in the same

room searching through Kiyan's wardrobe to find the dress he saw in the documentary. The viewer realizes that the other side of the room, where Modabber stands, is not tinted blue but almost gray, barely lit with a lamp Modabber holds. In this way, Bayzai aesthetically makes a physical and spatial separation between Modabber and Kiyan who are virtually living in two separate worlds. Modabber ruthlessly throws one dress after another on the bed where Kiyan is sleeping. The frenetic tracking shots move from right to left to show Modabber's hysterical behavior and Kiyan's suffering in her sleep. These rapid traveling shots are repeated several times but in the last tracking shot from right to left first we see Modabber. Then the camera moves rapidly and the viewer expects to see Kiyan but surprisingly sees Moddaber once again. It takes few seconds to realize that this is not his image but its reflection on the mirror. The camera travels another half circle to visualize him again. This could metaphorically suggest that Modabber is extremely absorbed in his thoughts. The sequence is shot with a wide-angle lens. It results in the distortion of the image of Modabber – since the shots of Modabber are taken by wide-angle lens in medium to close up shots –,the shape of the room, and Kiyan's bed. The sequence depicts the way Bayzai engages in the interplay of images and memories and raises questions about the reliability of image and memory in recovering the past and reality. This idea recurs, albeit in different forms, throughout the film.

The close-up shots in which Kiyan's face fades away with a dazzling light suggest the change of time and space as she passes from the "real" present time to embrace a surreal moment in the past. These scenes particularly focus on the inner life of a character and her personal pains. This is also stressed by showing a graphic

account of Kiyan's dreams when she describes her nightmares to her therapist. The scenes with the therapist are clipped and the dialogues are elliptical in favor of visualizing an illustrated account of her surreal dreams. In illustrating the dreams, long takes are used frequently, showing Kiyan running in an endless hallway. Kiyan keeps on going through a long hallway but she doesn't reach anywhere. In these scenes Kiyan is filmed in a far shot and the ceiling of the hallway is highlighted – a tribute to *Citizen Kane* – to emphasize her powerlessness. Long takes also recur in the rainy scenes, accompanied by the sound of thunderstorms, where Kiyan passes an alley or steps down never-ending stairs while Modabber is shown spying on her in his car.

The scenes that visualize Kiyan's mother are black and white. The past time, in general, is signified by the black and white shots. Other instances are the old Tehran paintings and the pictures of the film crew, which show them in the process of filming the documentary. Nevertheless, all these black and white images – which are supposed to be less clear – are more explicit and even illuminating, in terms of unfolding Kiyan's past, than many images Kiyan sees in reality. When Modabber interrogates Kiyan, who is tired and distressed, the reverse-angle shots that show Modabber from Kiyan's point of view are blurry and unclear. Thus the images of the past are more lively and clear than what she sees in the present time. It is as if Kiyan feels more at home with her internal thoughts than the external reality. External reality is merely an intruder to her consciousness. The deliberately blemished editing of *Perhaps Some Other Time* matches Kiyan's deeply problematic identity.

Perhaps Some Other Time, as many other films made by Bayzai, engages fast editing along with fast camera movements that involve long takes. This incorporation

of a montage-based filming, along with mobile camera movements, put a break on the realist effects of the narrative. In a similar way, as I have examined, the light contrasts in this film enhances a dramatic and emotional effect. The black and white scenes signify the past. They also connote a historical aura as these scenes resonate the rhythm of *ta'zieh*. In a *ta'zieh* all of the players wear black and white or neutral-color outfits, except for one character, Shemr, who is to murder Imam Hussein and usually wears red attire. After the death of Imam, all characters are represented in black, except for Imam's murderers, Shemr and Yazid. Employing black and white scenes and the light contrasts in the film is reminiscent of a *ta'zieh* scene, which in turn brings a historical connotation. All these effects make the viewer become conscious of the fact that a narrative is a manipulated and constructed product.

Finally, Modabber locates Haghnegar, the man whom he suspects of having an affair with Kiyan. He finds out that Haghnegar owns an antique shop and arranges to visit him personally. The antique objects make Modabber enter a world that has little to do with the present time. By viewing the antique objects in a dark cellar that looks so far from the outside world, Modabber becomes conscious of (the significance of) the past. The antique shop is a reminiscent of the formal history and what is – selectively – left from the past. Paradoxically, in his quest to know his wife, he finds a great deal about the formal history and historically "significant" objects. For instance, he gets to see a watch given to Nasser a-din Shah by Queen Victoria, Shah Hassan's armor, and Changiz Khan's stamp. These objects do not attract Modabber's attention as such. On the contrary, it is a "historically insignificant" picture, as Haghnegar calls

it, that captures Modabber's interest and makes him even more suspicious, as the picture noticeably resembles Kiyan.

Both Kiyan and Modabber hardly find any evidence in the official/documented history in their separate but related inquests. Neither the antiques that embody the official history, the birth archives, nor Modabber's documentaries reveal the past. On the contrary, Kiyan's true identity is to be recovered through a reconstruction of Kiyan's personal memory, as well as her search in more intimate spaces like pictures, family albums, and homes. In Haghnegar's home, both Modabber and Kiyan are surprised when they see Vida, who looks strikingly like Kiyan. It is at this moment that they become closer to reality. In shots with minimal movements, we see the twin sisters as they both look troubled. Subsequently, the fragmented shots of Kiyan represent how she is traumatized. The subliminal flashbacks signify another expressionistic moment in *Perhaps Some Other Time*. They portray Kiyan and her shadow on the wall. But the shadow, ironically, does not match Kiyan's position in the room. On the contrary, the shadow resembles Kiyan's mother in her routine activities. This moment is a vital moment for both Kiyan and Vida.

Vida, who felt blamed by her mother for the giving up of her twin sister (as the mother could only take care of one of them) tries to bring historical evidence to the lost history. Vida presents a picture of the twin sisters, Vida and her lost sister Kiyan. The viewer of the film is now fully informed that the time and space in the present time are in fact anchored in the past and that the history has intruded the present through the old pictures of a family album. This recalls a passage by Bazin in "The Ontology of Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema*, where he states:

> Hence the charm of family albums. Those gray and sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration, freed from their destiny; not, however by the prestige of art but by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. (14)

In a similar fashion, family albums turn into a significant space in the film, even more significant than the hegemonic and institutionalized written history. It is in this family album, or the "embalmed time" that Kiyan finds her lost identity. She could finally see her childhood image "at a set of moment", in Bazin's terms, belonging to the past. What she sees here was missing in the family albums of her adopted parents that had pictures of her older ages. She is seemingly living in the present time but as the pictures represent, her identity is fully attached to the past when "change [is] mummified," as Bazin says (14-15). Nevertheless, Kiyan's identity is not destined to be a mummified identity in her past. Once estranged from her self, she now moves to free the self from the photographs, as well as her past, to craft a new identity through reconciliation with the present moment. When Modabber says: "We should go and visit the lady and gentleman who raised you," she replies: "mother and father." The whole set of events in Vida's house – from the moment the film crew sets the filming equipment to when Kiyan and Vida see each other, and finally when Modabber responds to their invitation by saying "perhaps some other time, we will visit you" – signifies a ritual through which Kiyan transforms to embrace her adopted parents as

her "real" parents. More importantly, in a ritualistic manner, Kiyan who was so concerned about her past identity, transcends time and comes to terms with her own past.

As in many other films by Bayzai with similar figures, Kiyan metaphorically signifies the modern collective identity, lost in the formal history. Kiyan recovers her identity and refreshes and refashions her memory in less formal and homier spaces forgotten in our collective memory. In these informal/homey spaces, insignificant objects, such as pictures and paintings, become significant. As we realize, people in *Perhaps Some Other Time* live in a world of objects. The antiques and the picture of Kiyan's mother in Haghnegar's store, Vida's expressionistic paintings, Modabber's film stocks and other film equipment, and Kiyan's family albums all draw the spectator's attention through shots with limited movements, pans and tilts. Similar to *The Crow* and *Travelers*, in *Perhaps Some Other Time*, antiques denote the characters' ties with the past. This is also reminiscent of Alain Renais's *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* (Chapplle) and the way objects determine the clichéd lives of its characters. In *Muriel*, as Crissa-Jean Chapplle observes: "[the characters'] banal existence has allowed them to become objects as well. Their hopeless lives revolve around objects instead of communication with others. They can't free themselves from their rigid patterns of existence. The characters' wasted lives resemble dusty antiques" (Chapplle). [3] In contrast, the characters in *Perhaps Some Other Time* manage to leave history behind. In their journey of recovering and re-establishing their identities, they strive to know themselves and the past. Nevertheless, the objects and their signification of the past do not imprison these people in history. Their examination of

the past merely paves the way for the characters' growth in the future. Therefore, while Renais employs antique objects to reveal their imprisonment in the past memories, Bayzai uses the same objects to liberate the characters from past. Although the portrayal of these objects emphasizes the significance of the past in a modern understanding of the notions of self and identity, the objects do not delimit the characters in their move towards the future.

In any event, although Kiyan transcends time and comes to terms with her past, knowing her past is crucial in her definition of the self. In other words, the "present self" in *Perhaps Some Other Time* is not separated from the "historical self." What was missing in Kiyan's search for her identity was her mother who recurrently appears in her dreams. In fact, to Kiyan, getting to know her mother/her historical self becomes vital because it is the reconstruction of her past that reconstitutes the interactions of her present time. In the last sequences, Kiyan, finally succeeds to reconstruct her past, through her newly found sister. She learns about her mother and finds a meaningful answer to the question of her identity. Thus, it is the existence of her mother as her historical self that adds contextual meaning to Kiyan's life. *Perhaps Some Other Time* interrogates the relevance of the modern social subject who is unaware of her past.

In a similar fashion, this film raises questions about the authenticity of the image in the documentary, a genre engaged with the realities of the world. As mentioned before, in the documentary about the air pollution, the apparently natural smoke, we are told, is artificially made. On the other hand, the heavy smoke that looks unnatural to Modabber is said to be natural. In the same way, the woman in the documentary

identified by Modabber as Kiyan, turns out to be Vida. That film conflates fact and illusion is also evident in Bayzai's ironical choice of the surname 'Modabber,' meaning 'prudent' or 'far-sighted,' for Kiyan's husband, who was unaware of Kiyan's thoughts, fears, and her real identity. The next question that comes to the viewer's mind is likely to what extent Haghnegar – literally meaning the one who sees the truth – is right about the history of the antiques in the way he described them. Furthermore, in a broader perspective, the spectator confronts this question that in what way Bayzai manipulates the viewer, by bringing facts and fiction, to convey his point in the film?

Moreover, Bayzai's reflexive cinematic techniques problematize our understanding of facts, on a different level of reality – the off stage reality. Susan Taslimi's performance as three different figures, Kiyan, Vida, and the mother in the black and white scenes that signifies the past, provides a self-referential frame to the potentially art-ificiality of the so-called reality as the basis of history. Due to the deliberately similar makeovers for Taslimi in her three roles, the audience recognizes her as the same person and is encouraged to remain critically distant from the fictional layer in which she plays three different roles. It makes the spectator stay conscious about the dramatized nature of a constructed historical account. Another self-conscious decision – a counter-cinematic practice that makes fact and fiction blended – is when Kiyan's rediscovery of her sister is shot by Modabber's film crew. Kiyan's new identity is to be "documented" in the same way the formal history was. In a textually-oriented culture, the people, who are educated with a "documented" formal history, tend to accept it uncritically. This sequence with the presence of a film crew to document a historical moment, however, challenges our unconsciously uncritical

approval of documents. This "performed" sequence of the film suggests the way history is "made" or "constructed."

On the on level of reality, the virtual and historical existence of Kiyan is not separated from her sister Vida or her mother. Thus, Kiyan's identity is multi-layered both in its modern presence, as well as its relation to the past. This is a metonymically universal model that relates humans' historical identity to their modern subjectivity. As subjects of modernity, humans assume "identities," both influenced by their history as well as the contemporary circumstances, rather than a single-dimensional identity.

Perhaps Some Other Time is based on the power of the image as this is a cinematic production that challenges history in its re-imagining of the neglected part of history. Moreover, this film is anchored on the concept of imagination in its portraying of Kiyan's dreams, Modabber's false speculations, and Kiyan and Vida's imagining and recovering of the past. For instance, Kiyan observes, reproduces, and retains images in her memory. Remembering and recovering identity in Kiyan's life does not take her to the past. Kiyan, as a modern person, was a stranger to her self because she did not know about her past identity. Finally, however, she regains and recovers the lost self but this matter does not stop her in the past. The power of the imagination, by the end, separates her from the past as well as from reality as she faces the future. As the title of the film suggests, she may return to her roots to reconsider the past, Perhaps Some Other Time. In the present time, though, she looks forward to embracing future possibilities.

The notion of constructing history is not merely seen in *Perhaps Some Other Time*. Contrariwise, Bayzai's filmmaking is deeply engaged with the re/construction, and deconstruction of modern history. In each film, he examines these concepts from a different point of view. Bayzai has explored the issue of reconstructing the image of women extensively. In fact, no other Iranian director has considered gender issues and the remythification of women representation more thoroughly than Bayzai.

The Cultural Amnesia and Re-historicizing of Women Lost in (Filmic) History

The making of *The Stranger and the Fog*, which is Bayzai's fourth feature, unleashed new possibilities in the Iranian film industry. *The Stranger and the Fog* was a landmark because of its mythic language and, more importantly, for establishing a cinematic convention that was to historicize and remember women.

In terms of form, as both Iranian filmgoers and film critics noted, this film was an innovative and groundbreaking experience in Bayzai's filmmaking (Naficy, *Collection of Essays*, Mehrabi 167). Before the making of *The Stranger and the Fog*, Bayzai was mostly engaged in directing realist films, with rather explicit social concerns as in *Amu Sibīlū* (*Uncle Moustache*, 1970), *Safar* (*Travel*, 1971), and *Ragbār* (*Thunder Shower*, 1971). In *The Stranger and the Fog*, however, Bayzai employs an unprecedented mythological style in narrating the story of Ayat and Ra'na and their challenges with mysterious forces they encounter both on land and in the sea. The people who are portrayed in this film do not seem to belong to any particular ethnic group. On the contrary, they are mythical figures in an unknown time and location. The village in which the story happens is a mysterious coastal community. The narrative is allegorical and the plot is unrealistic. The motivation behind the

characters' actions and fights in *The Stranger and the Fog* seems very simple but unknowable. In narrating the story of the villagers and the sea inhabitants, Bayzai uses a metaphorical language. This film was praised mostly for its complex and novel *mise-en-scène* and film grammar. As Naficy indicates, Bayzai spent two years and more than three hundred thousand dollars to accomplish this project (*Collection of Essays* 277).

In my view, this film is equally important because of its unparalleled focus on women and their exercising of power. In fact, *The Stranger and the Fog* was the onset of a different kind of cinema that disturbs gender conventions to historicize the portrayal of women who were subject to conventionalized approaches of Iranian cinema. This approach was not merely seen in explicitly commercial films – what is known as the *filmfarsi* genre – and popular movies. On the contrary, it sneaked in the Iranian new wave films, too.

As I discussed in my first chapter, this era was a defining moment in the history of Iranian cinema with the birth of the new wave movement that enriched the national cinema and brought international gravity to Iranian films. Although these films were highly engaged with social problems and were momentous productions in terms of their original cinematic stylistics, almost all of them dealt primarily with male issues.

There were few exceptions to this male-centered cinema. *Bītā*, which was made by Hajir Daryush in 1972, was one of those rare films with a central attention on femininity. The main focus of the film is on a girl, named Bita, with an alcoholic father and a careless mother. It examines the struggles, fears, and anxieties of young women in modern Iran. Moreover, this film explores the impact of family and society

on abandoned women. In this pessimistic narrative – a common trind in Persian cultural forms of expression during the seventies – Bita is eventually led to prostitution. The fact that the film-script of this movie was written by Goli Taraghi, a prominent female writer of the time, may explain its unprecedented focus on female issues. Googoosh, the most popular pop singer in the pre-revolutionary period, played the role of Bita. Although Daryush had both intellectually and aesthetically invested on the film by hiring Taraghi and Googoosh, *Bītā* was not recognized as an important movie in the seventies. This film along with its gendered focus was soon forgotten in the history of Iranian cinema.

To explore how the new wave films dealt with gender issues, I viewed many of these films again. Surprisingly, both locally and internationally acclaimed films like *The Cow*, *Qeysar*, *Rezā Muturī* (*Reza, the Cyclist*, 1970), *Aqāy'i Hālū* (*Mr. Simpleton*, 1970), *Sādiq Kurdih* (*Sādiq*, *The Kurdish*, 1971), *Tabī'at'i Bījān* (*Still Life* 1974), *Asrār'i Ganj'i Darrih'i Jinī* (*Secrets of the Treasure in the Jinni Valley*, 1974), and *Gavazn-hā* (*Deer*, 1974) either ignored women altogether or gave them a secondary and conventional role.

During this period, even critically acclaimed films such as *Still Life* and *The Cow* that dealt with poetic representations of life from a philosophical standpoint, did not give a realistic depiction of women. The films made at the time had a socialist political agenda, but it is through a male gaze that these themes are being explored. Generally speaking, the dominant trind in those years was to focus on the representation of masculinity that resulted in either ignoring women or in a shallow personification of female figures in subservient roles. Women in such films appear in

one-dimensional roles like victims of sexual mistreatment (in *Qeysar*), sufferers of male harassment (in *Pust-chī* [*The Postman*, 1972]), and seductresses (*Secrets of the Treasure in the Jinni Valley*). In the absence of a real portrayal of women, films such as *Qyesar* and *Sādiq, the Kurdish* – impacted by the cultural currents of the time – typically emphasized the personification of male actors who embodied the characteristics and representations of power or the irritated masculine power that is suppressed. The main theme in these films is social mobility, the injustice and class-related issues.

In the realm of popular cinema, the robust physical presence of actors such as Mohammad Ali Fardin, Said Rod, and Behrouz Vosoughi, with their appealing masculine gestures, complemented by the deep masculine voice of actors like Nasser Malek-Motiei, established a male-centered aesthetics in the Iranian film industry. The persona of these actors was energy, charm, and sexual vigor. In this era of Iranian film history, the male authority is rehearsed without even being challenged by female resistance. Thus, the representation of femininity suggests a voiceless and static role for women to "sustain" the social control and the "normal" parameters of gender behavior. The starlets including Googoosh, Forouzan, and Pouri Banaei were chosen from the most fine-looking actresses and singers of the time to meet the standards of the objects of desire of these handsome actors. These female figures were "important" to the narrative because of their supporting role to the male figures. Moreover, by employing these young starlets with their attractive physical attributes and expressive bodies, the directors and producers were responding to the market imperatives of the time. There were also minor actresses who would usually perform in dance sequences

to fulfill the masculine gaze by displaying the female body. Although new wave cinema was criticizing social problems, it operated this stylistic model, to a certain extent, in films such as Hatami's *Tughī* (1370) and Kimiyaei's *Qeysar*. The majority of these films were narrated in a realistic mode, however, the gender representation was not based on the reality of the Iranian society because they erased the multi-layered and diverse identity of half of the Iranian population (or women).

On the contrary, although Bayzai chooses a surreal *mise-en-scène* in *The Stranger and the Fog* and employs a highly allegorical language, its concerns are realist as it re-imagines both men and women who are challenging with real problems that could happen in everyday life. As mentioned, this film portrays the relationship between Ra'na, a coastal widow, and Ayat, a stranger who mysteriously appears on the seashore. The sea creatures insistently haunt Ayat. They represent the "unknown" as we don't know who they are. At one point, when Ayat gets new scars by stabbing each sea creature, the spectator probably wonders if these creatures do literally exist but imply different aspects of Ayat's personality. They follow Ayat, from the sea, to the haven of the village. Ra'na is also troubled by her dead husband's ancestors. The village council decides that if Ayat wishes to stay in the village, he should marry a local woman. Ayat, in return, asks for Ra'na's hand. The villagers reject the suggestion but Ra'na accepts his proposal. In deep focus shots – that Bayzai employs very rarely – Ra'na is portrayed in the foreground against the villagers who are shown in a foggy background. The deep focus shots in the foggy setting connote a mysterious atmosphere in this film. Moreover, as Naficy reveals, this type of camera work represent Ra'na's isolation and distance from the rest of the villagers (*A Collection of*

Essays on Bayzai 279). Ra'na and Ayat are both strangers to their surroundings. They are not at home either on the land or in the sea. Therefore, together they set off a mutual fight on both arenas of land and sea. As critics including Naficy ("*Stranger*" 277) and Behzad Eshghi (293)[4] indicate, Bayzai has entertained Iranian and Japanese rituals in this film. Yet, in *The Stranger and the Fog*, Bayzai's meticulous gaze revisits these rituals. In fact, in this film, the conventionalized and conventionalizing rituals of any kind are abandoned in favor of crafting new conventions. As a deviation from the hierarchy of power and privilege, the hegemony of male dominance – here represented by the village council and Ra'na's in-laws – is problematized. Through rejection of behavioral conventions, in personifying Ra'na, traditional and patriarchal codes of behavior are being questioned.

This "inclusion" of women in the Iranian film discourse becomes a tradition in Bayzai's aesthetics. For instance, in his next film, *Cherike-ye Tara* (The *Ballad of Tara* 1978), which he made just before the revolution, the leading female figure, Tara, rejects to be a subordinated rural widow. There is even a tendency towards adventure in her personification as she finds out about a mysterious sword in her grandfather's belongings and faces the historical man in the woods. Thus, refashioning the conventionalized gender representations becomes more controversial in *The Ballad of Tara*. Unlike Ra'na, Tara has no match among men in her village and thus becomes a heroine without an identical hero.

Cinema is a cultural production and a reflection of the society it represents. It is next to impossible to investigate films without considering their social and historical backgrounds. As my discussions in previous chapters show, investigating the formal

elements in films is instructive of cinema studies. A pure formalist approach that studies film as a self-contained vessel of immanent meaning, however, would not represent the significance of, for instance Bayzai's historicizing practices in *The Stranger and the Fog* and his subsequent films. It is only through exploring films in their historical and socio-cultural contexts that we can appreciate their meanings. Iranian cinema as a cultural and artistic discourse interacts with other cultural discourses as well as institutionalized and non-institutionalized systems. The film productions are partly a reflection of, and a response to, history and societal situations. Bayzai's different gaze and his restorative attempts in re-imagining women in urban, rural, historical, or modern settings were a response to not only the Iranian film productions of the time but also the written/formal modernist history of Iran that excluded women from historiographical accounts. Here I bring an example of the modernist historiographical texts to depict the way they dealt with gender issues. This sheds light on my discussion of the significance of Bayzai's re-membering and reconstituting the forgotten half of the society in history, through a visual and artistic medium. In Bayzai's films, this re-appearance of the female segment of society redefined the relations between men and women.

Many Iranian historiographical accounts, in the twentieth century, are written by employing a patriarchal point of view. The Iranian historical narratives and the collective national memory of Iranians depend upon this history that is "construed" by historians. As a result, it has been the historians' particular gaze that has made the history of gender relations and, to a certain extent, the social gender arrangements. In

a general sense, it could be argued that all historical accounts are ideological products. Maria Alonso has proposed this idea when she stated:

> All histories, whether spoken or written, are produced in an encounter between a hermeneutics and a field of social action which is symbolically constituted…Much of this encounter takes place "after the fact"; histories are retrospectives because the contours of the past are finally delineated and fixed from the vantage point of the present. Thus, the contingency of history-as-action is always mitigated by the backward gaze of history-as-representation which orders and explains, which introduces teleology hardly evident at the time of the original events (34).

This holds true in terms of Iranian historical accounts. As Afsaneh Najmabadi pinpoints, "what is considered in those narratives as unimportant and what is thus lost in those histories, becomes productive of national forgetting" (174). The history of the modern era in Iran[5] was self-consciously a history of men. Najmabadi demonstrates that Mehdi Malekzadeh, in his historiography of the Iranian constitutional revolution,[6] presents a male-oriented history. His use of the words *man* and *men* (*mard* and *mardan*), "which in Persian do not carry the potential meaning of 'generic human being(s)'" (Najmabadi 180), as the main focus and subject of events, represents this emphasis. In Malekzadeh's account of the constitutional revolution, the exclusion of women, except in brief digressions, is justified since he believes women were socially excluded from the revolutionary activities. Other sources of history are not drastically different from Malekzadeh's text in this respect. As a result, women in general seem to be absent from the collective national memory.

Najmabadi, in *The Story of Daughters of Quchan: Gender and National Memory in Iranian History*, represents one such example. In this book, Najamabadi narrates the story of women and girls who were sold by "needy peasants to pay their taxes in a bad harvest year – 1905, the year preceding the Iranian constitutional revolution –" or "taken as booty in a raid by Turkoman tribesmen against a village settlement" in northeastern Iran (1). For a few years, ordinary people, Moslim preachers, and social democratic militants remembered this story in the form of poetry and prose, street songs and satire. However, this historical event vanished from subsequent narratives of that revolution, and was thus erased from the cultural memory (Najmabadi 1-9). Since the story of daughters of Quchan was not categorized as "histories of grand ideas and great men," as the ones Fereidun Adamiyat and Malik zadeh wrote about (Najmabadi 174), it became the subject of national forgetting. Ironically, the notion of gender was a central structuring category in the making of Iranian modernity in the beginning of the 20th century. As Najmabadi states:

> Concepts central to the imagination and construction of a modern Iran were envisaged in terms related to concepts of femininity and masculinity. Nation (*milat*), for instance, was largely scripted as a brotherhood – at least until the first decade of the twentieth century, when women began to claim their space as sisters in the nation. The modern notion of *vatan* (home-land), on the other hand, was envisaged as female – as a beloved and as a mother. Closely linked to the maleness of *milat* and the femaleness of *vatan* was the multiple load of

> the concept of *namus* (honor), which shifted in this period between the idea of purity of woman (*'ismat*) and integrity of the nation. (182-83)

By remembering the story of daughters of Quchan, Najmabadi carries out a "recuperative effort," as she confirms: "[A] recuperation of women into the national narrative and of gender into historiography" (8). In the process of writing a different account of Iranian history, scholars such as Najmabadi "re-write" women into the history of Iranian modernity that previously excluded women. What made the earlier Iranian historiographical texts women-free zones was the political culture of the society.

Cinema as a cultural form of expression was not an exception to this cultural "norm." As discussed earlier, in many popular and art movies, women were subjects of de-historicizing practices of the national memory reinforced by the artistic media. Even in critically acclaimed films made by the new wave directors such as Mehrjouei and Kimiyaei women took stereotypical or secondary roles. Bayzai's filmmaking before 1977 shows a different approach towards gender issues. Women in films such as *Thunder Shower*, and, especially, *The Stranger and the Fog* are represented from a more realistic viewpoint. Bayzai's reconstructing of the national memory and his reconsidering of the gender-oblivious national cinema is furthered in his post-revolutionary productions.

In the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period Iranian cinema, as the dominant cultural form, took a drastic change in terms of gender representation and resumed the place of women lost by cultural amnesia. Bahram Bayzai, in this epoch, has initiated a new cinema in which women are re-historicized and re-mythified.[7] His

films depict the hidden layer of modern history ignored for decades. His filmic version of "history" of culture, however, does not rely on the official or canonical version of history. On the contrary, in Bayzai's filmmaking, the long time segregated elements of mythos (myth) and logos (truth) are integrated by giving mythology and popular arts key roles in his aesthetic sensibilities. Thus, a main emphasis on his films is given to the recovery of the Iranian gender-oblivious history. In this recovering practice, Bayzai re-imagines women not through bringing factual narratives, but through a metaphorical language in fictional situations that are in turn deeply rooted in the realities of the society.

In a society where women are de-personalized and viewed collectively, Bayzai's filmmaking is an oasis for female personal expression. In his films, concepts such as revolution or explicit social concerns are set-aside in favor of a more imaginative and private aesthetics that examines gendered issues in the light of questions such as modernity and identity. Bayzai's aesthetics glorifies women's private and personal issues that were rarely brought up in the Iranian history.

The representing of de-conventionalized gender roles, in both Bayzai's filmmaking and Iranian cinema was initiated in the making of *The Stranger and the Fog*. In this film, which is narrated in an unrealistic mode, the social construction of sexual difference in the village takes a more realistic form (compared to the previous Iranian films). This film brings a meticulous gender analysis of the village's inhabitants in portraying Ra'na and Ayat. In their mutual fights against the known and unknown powers of the land and the sea, Ra'na and Ayat are both represented as powerful but displaced and mystified figures. In this film, notions of masculinity and

femininity, absent from previous Iranian films and national memory, are being examined and redefined. Unlike the women illustrated in films such as *Qeysar* and *The Cow*, Ra'na is not doomed to take a secondary role. On the other hand, she is a powerful figure who is able to decide her destiny. Ra'na has equal opportunities of domination and subjection. The representation of women in *The Stranger and the Fog* is rather different from Bayzai's previous films. Although *Thunder Shower* portrays a woman (Parvaneh Ma'soumi as Atefeh) as a central character in the film, she is depicted as a physically attractive but vulnerable woman who needs to be protected and loved. Atefeh's ultimate fate depends on her two lovers' psychological battle – the teacher, a stranger to the community, and a butcher, who is considered the insider and a legitimate patriarchal power in the neighborhood. A radical move from representing Atefeh to Ra'na, *The Stranger and the Fog* shows an independent woman, who ignores the biblical words of the village council, marries a stranger and initiates a search for the truth in a misty maritime bay. The foggy setting of the film suggests the complications in the journey of women and men who strive to discover the meaning of life.

The Stranger and the Fog established a new gendered discourse in Iranian cinema, but it is in *The Ballad of Tara* that gender identity and power are completely switched. In this film, Iranian film culture is completely transformed in the portrayal of Tara as a mythic woman who is the sole fighter in the battle of life. The prevailing and powerful performance of Susan Taslimi, as Tara, in a primitive setting symbolizes the power of nature, love, fertility, and pleasure. Nevertheless, Tara represents more than a mere force of nature. She embodies a multi-dimensional human being who is

capable of working, thinking and choosing on her own terms. In one scene Tara says: "I work for every single bite that I grab, or each breath that I take. There is no fancy in my life. Then, why shouldn't I laugh my head off or act silly [every once in a while]." In this film, the exercising of power, a male commodity in the national memory, is delegated to Tara. The dependent femininity of Atefeh in *The Thunder Shower* is now replaced by a sober independence in the representation of Tara. On the other hand, the male figures in *The Ballad of Tara* are either immature (such as the boy who falls in love with Tara) or insignificant (such as Ghelich). The most important male figure in the film is the historical man. The inverted gender depiction in *Tara*, however, has resulted in an unexpected softness in the personification of the historical man, despite his ironically ferocious physical appearance in his war outfit.

This de-conventionalizing the gender representation, which started to form in *Thunder Shower*, is further rehearsed in Bayzai's subsequent films. As opposed to Kimiyaei or Taghvaei, both of whom employ expressive actors with obvious physical presence, Bayzai's leading actors are not physically marked as powerful figures. For instance, Parviz Fanni-zadeh, a short and slim man with thick spectacles, who was cast as the leading figure (the teacher), does not represent the conventional masculine attributes such as vigor and sexual energy. Moreover, Bayzai's employing of normal looking men (such as casting Hussein Parvaresh as Esalat in *The Crow* and Parviz Pour-Hosseini as Na'i's husband in *Bashu*), in contrast to dazzling and powerful actresses such as Ma'soumi and Taslimi, de-conventionalized gender representation in the realm of Iranian cinema.

Male figures in films, including *Bashu the Little Stranger* or *Dog-Eat-Dog*, are more vulnerable and less sophisticated than the female figures. In a number of post-revolutionary films, such as Ebrahim Hatami-kia's *Ajans-e Shishe'i* (*The Glass Agency*, 1998) and Kimiyaei's *Dandan-e Mar* (*Snake's Fang*, 1990) and *I'tirāz* (*Protest*, 2000), the irritated, skilled masculine energy is visualized to connote the frustration caused by the Iran-Iraq war and the post-revolutionary social chaos. On the contrary, Bayzai's aesthetics does not follow this patriarchal model. The male figures are not portrayed as morally or physically superior to their female counterparts. The male dominance that is illustrated in films such as *The Glass Agency* is sometimes replaced, in Bayzai's aesthetics, with a kind of weakness attributed to the male characters in his films made after the revolution. This weakness is represented in *Bashu* when Na'i's husband – who is a farmer – is shown as a disabled man, returning from (apparently) the war front. In *Dog-Eat-Dog* the moral weakness of Mo'aser, as opposed to Golrokh's honesty and strength, depicts a problematic masculinity. In his post-revolutionary films, Bayzai tends to show men lacking maturity and/or morality, at times, having childish sensitivities. This immaturity is portrayed in the personification of the historical man and Ghelich, in *Tara*.

On the other hand, through a "recuperative practice," Bayzai's aesthetics recognizes women with a rule-breaking dignity and boldness. From Tara to Golrokh, women are not camouflaged within culturally approved rhetoric of home, marriage, and motherhood. Tara, a widow with two children, for instance, is not depicted as a conventionally nurturing and concerned mother. She shows a reluctant tenderness towards her children in the film. Similarly, Asieh in *The Crow* does not embody a

self-sacrificing wife absorbed in the household affairs. On the contrary, she is more involved in her career as a teacher of the deaf and her growing plants in a greenhouse that her husband is not aware of its existence. Na'i's striving in the rice paddies and home is more in tune with nature than culture. She is a single mother with two children who has to work hard to survive. The moral power of these women is not based on their sexuality. It is grounded in their work and mystical/psychological journey of self-discovery and self-exploration, which make them groundbreaking strangers to their surroundings. Although Tara is portrayed as an eager and sensitive woman towards men (especially in the romantic incident with Ghelich in the woods), on other occasions, she is capable of acting as a feelingless female in her encounter with Ghelich, her brother-in-law and the historical man.

In general, gender identity in Bayzai's films is not merely embedded in cultural practice or the social facts. Furthermore, Bayzai's gender representation does not rely on the collective memory or the established cinematic conventions. His films, on the other hand, map out different relations of power and gender in the Iranian cultural system in terms of illustrating masculinity and femininity, gender dominance, subordination, and resistance, as well as their articulation in cinema. The filmic treatment of women in Bayzai's films re-historicizes the relations between men and women by representing a more liberated gender identity that does not match the gendered behavior in the Iranian official history and mainstream cinema. Bayzai's sensibilities, on the other hand, convey a new re-mythologization of the old.

Connecting the Past to the Present: Gender Representation in a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Many directors, from the late 1980s and onward, joined Bayzai in the exploration of gendered thematics in the Iranian cultural arena. Kim Longinotto and Ziba Mir-Hosseini's *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998), Rakhshan Bani-Etemad's *Bānūū Urdībihisht* (*The May Lady*, 1998), Samira Makhmalbaf's *Sīb* (*The Apple* 1998), Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Gabbeh* (1997), and Tahmineh Milani's *Du Zan* (*Two Women*, 1998), *Nīmi'i Pinhān* (*The Hidden Half*, 2001), and *Vakunish'i Panjum* (*The Fifth Reaction*, 2003) are a few examples of the gendered representations in the contemporary Iranian cinema. However, as opposed to many Iranian films – whose main target is the international audiences – Bayzai's films do not exoticize Iranian women by interpolating social and gender issues.

For instance, *Gabbeh* (1997), from a cross-cultural standpoint, projects an exotic land with exotic gendered relations. *Gabbeh* is an unconventional love story that portrays nomadic life in Iran. This film, which is undeniably one of the best productions of the Iranian art cinema, was critically acclaimed because of its different technical and thematic re-investing of gendered representation. As Dabashi asserts, "[t]hroughout *Gabbeh* Makhmalbaf uses close-ups for showing the face of a woman in love and long shots for the man she loves – a radical reversal of the primacy of the masculine conception of love characteristic of the entire history of Iranian culture" (*Close Up* 207). Representing nomadic (more precisely Qashqaei) life is an exotic experience for many city dwellers in Iran, and (definitely) for the non-Iranian audiences. This film was a visually attractive film in Iran and the international scene.

In fact, it was so appealing that the nomadic gabbeh, which is a type of colorful and thick carpet, became a significant item both the Iranian and international carpet market. Before 1997, it was the Qashqaei nomads who mainly used gabbeh. This nomadic carpet would be hardly found even in Bazaar-e Vakil in the city of Shiraz, a local market for Qashqaei products. It was totally unknown in Bazaar-e Tehran (Tehran market), which is a major exporting venue of Persian carpets to the West. After the screening of *Gabbeh*, many affluent carpet shops in northern Tehran started to sell best-quality gabbehs. At the same time, it became a significant exported product. Therefore, not only was the film widely received in the Iranian and international theaters, but also the "exotic" carpet it introduced became a familiar piece in both the national and Western markets. The economic impact of screening a film, in this case, shows to what extent exhibiting the exotic could affect the viewer. What I speculate is that for many average filmgoers *Gabbeh* was a visually rich portrayal and celebration of the exotic colors and lives. Lindsey Moore's study regarding cross-cultural spectatorship supports this speculation as she states:

> Cross-cultural spectators do not merely consume but also contribute to the production of meaning in films. Laura Marks suggests that "as well as bearing meanings to the audiences, [films] receive impressions from the people who have seen them… [The n]onnative spectator always already has expectations, so that … simplistic and stereotypical representations are the kind most easily read by mainstream Western audiences. (26)

I should say, however, that regardless of the nationality of the spectator, any viewer who is less acquainted with the cultural background of a film, and especially a

film in realistic mode, could theoretically fall into equating the narrative with the "real" situation. As Moore also suggests, to some extent, "the ethnographic object continues to be assimilated as 'the real thing' despite efforts to complicate the association between the two" (25). While Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Gabbeh* is an aesthetic landmark in Iranian cinema, its exotic aura may have had influenced the publicity of the film. In a different way, as I showed in my previous discussions, in Bayzai's films, women, like men, are troubled and face serious questions about their identities. Yet they are not presented to fascinate the non-Iranian viewer as representations of the other women in an alien culture. The story of women such as Asieh in *The Crow*, Tara in *The Ballad of Tara*, and Golrokh in *Dog-Eat-Dog* are not exotic narratives of "other" women or what "the West has been waiting for Iran to tell about itself" (Darznik qtd in Moore 19). The issues that Bayzai's characters are dealing with are universally relevant questions of self and identity. Moreover, Bayzai's negation to exoticize the narrative results from his use of a highly dramatic settings and performances in his films. Thus, as opposed to directors, such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf, who have employed a poetic realist approach in their films, his aesthetic does not evoke a realist approach. Therefore, his films evade the seamless editing that conveys the impression of a real situation. Moreover, the employing of non-realistic *mise-en-scène* thwarts the spectator to identify the filmic space with an authentic social space. Thus, although actresses in his films have to abide with the mandatory female dress code, the female figures are not to be rindered as ethnographic objects that denote the one-dimensional Iranian characters. On the contrary, they have dynamic characters with universally significant questions about their selves and

identities. The female representation in Bayzai's filmmaking is mobile and visible in both the filmic and social spaces. Symbolically, these women function as historical objects or more accurately, the re-mythologized historical objects.

The gendered issues in Bayzai's films are insinuated through his sophisticated language and mythological and historical allusions. Women like Kiyan in *Perhaps Some Other Time* do not represent the ethnographic cases. Furthermore, Bayzai's cinematic sensibilities do not explore gendered rights in the *Islamic* Iran. Contrariwise, they embark upon gender issues at a more profound level, as a dialectic response to the canonized historical and cinematic discourses. It is true that issues such as patriarchal dominance, self, and identity in Bayzai's films are examined from historical and cultural standpoints. These issues, however, have no direct link to the current political or religious circumstances in Iran. The cultural space of Bayzai's diegesis is not a response to the immediate social and political issues of Iran. On the other hand, the cultural space he portrays is rather complex and influenced by historical and mythological elements in a broader sense. The spectator can fully connect with Bayzai's thematics if she or he is informed by Iran's (in particular) and the East's (in general) history, mythology, and visual arts. Therefore, Bayzai's films do not lend themselves to any possible stereotypical readings. This is how Bayzai's aesthetics deviates from many other productions of Iranian cinema that exoticize their male and female subjects. Bayzai's films could not be comprehended through more obvious measures such as ideology and religion.

Bayzai and the Conventions of Iranian Visual Arts

> What is shown on the big screen is not real. For, if it were real, it was not to be called art. Art is something beyond reality. It touches the reality of people's lives. This is what we try to find out [through art][8] (Entezami in an interview with BBC Persian, 11 Oct. 2005).

The above description of "art" by the veteran performer and actor Ezzatollah Entezami could aptly illustrate Bayzai's aesthetics, with its deliberately dramatic structure, which draws heavily on the theatrical conventions of Eastern and Iranian visual arts. The fact that Bayzai has made extensive research (and published) on Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Iranian theatrical traditions and taught many courses on these topics at the University of Tehran (before the Islamic revolution) could explain his affinities, as a filmmaker, with the structure of drama. The impact of Iranian visual arts on Bayzai's filmmaking is particularly significant because of their historical and cultural significance. A close examination of the influence of Iranian theatrical forms on the filmmaker's sensibilities illuminates how these dramatic aspects of Bayzai's filmmaking have mobilized and reactivated Iranian popular arts in both filmic and cultural spheres.

Moreover, my argument on the relation of the theatrical past with modern cinematic techniques sheds light on the fact that films as cultural texts should not be approached as pure signs or language. What the linguistic-oriented film theories tend to forget is the fact that a film is a "staged" event. Cinema, as film viewers perceive it, is, to a great extent, about actors, music, props, and the "dramatic acts". Gilberto Perez has addressed this issue in *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*:

> Structuralist theory followed the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure and attempted to extend it beyond language proper to other forms of communication. Christian Metz made the most sustained effort to apply it to film. He concluded that film is not a language in any strict sense. But the linguistic bent of film theory has persisted. One of its consequences is that, though the ordinary moviegoer naturally remains interested in the actors and other dramatic aspects of the medium, the film scholar seldom invokes theater any longer and instead considers film a form of narration. The distinction between narrative and drama goes back to Aristotle: narrative is told, recounted in the words; drama is enacted, performed by actors on a stage. Film may look like a medium of enactment, with actors, props and scenery, but the language-minded theoretician looks upon it as a narrative medium that tells stories much in the manner of words on a page. (15)

Furthermore, what is neglected by the structuralist and poststructuralist film critics is the fact that films in any particular context are made in response to a specific historical background. My discussion in chapter three depicted that Bayzai's concerns are realistic and deal with the contemporary issues of the Iranian society in the modern era. At the same time, Bayzai's filmmaking draws on historical events, universal mythologies, as well as the Eastern and Iranian traditions of visual arts. The dramatic aspect of Bayzai's cinema, in particular, is a fundamental part that needs to be further explored. Also, as I discussed in the previous chapter, modern identity is being shaped and reshaped in response to cultural and historical specifications. It is not viable to study Bayzai's films synchronically without considering their historical and

mythological implications. In the previous sections, I examined the connection of Bayzai's filmmaking with the formal and informal histories. The following study, in turn, engages with a study of Bayzai's unique blending of the past and the present from a different perspective. By showing this blending of theatrical conventions and the present Iranian cinema, my discussion illuminates the way Bayzai's aesthetics creates a better integration of native Iranian dramatic and visual culture into a modern artistic form of expression. Furthermore, the ensuing discussion represents that Bayzai's filmmaking has uniquely fashioned a modern interpretation of the Iranian visual and dramatic culture. Besides, it explores Bayzai's engagement with the modern mythification, or his re/deconstruction of Iranian myths and historical narratives as to shed light on the question of modern identity.

The conventions of *ta'zieh*, amongst various theatrical forms that inspired Bayzaī, are represented in his films more frequently. The use of the *ta'zieh* conventions in *Travelers*, for instance, is formally and thematically significant in the production of meaning in this film. In chapter three, I briefly introduced the use of *ta'zieh* conventions in *Travelers*. A closer reading of the conventions of *ta'zieh*, its history and the way it is employed in Iranian cinema will shed light on Bayzai's deliberate borrowing from the conventions of visual arts in Iran.

Ta'zieh, or *Shabīh khānī* or *Shabīh gardānī*, is one of the oldest dramatic traditions in Iran. In modern times, *ta'zieh* endorses a form of popular passion play that depicts the events and atrocities confronted Imam Hussein and his apostles in the Neinava desert (or Karbala) during the Moharram of 61 Hijry (Islamic lunar calendar or 680 in the Gregorian calendar). The practice of *ta'zieh*, however, dates back to pre-

Islamic times (3000 BC). The discovered archeological evidences in the Zar-afshan valley, in the ancient city of Panj-kand (65 km far from Samarqand), depicts pictures of a passion play in memory of the Iranian hero, Siyavash, who was killed by the Turani conqueror, Afrasyab. Other sources such as *History of Bukhārā*, written in Arabic by Abubakr Muhammad ibn'i Ja'far al-Narshakhī in 332 A.H., describe the *ta'zieh* of Siyavash (known to natives as *Kīn'i Siyavash*) that was practiced in the city of Bukhārā. This *ta'zieh* was performed, as al-Narshakhī indicates, for more than 3000 years (qtd. in Bayzai's *Theater in Iran* 30-31). I should mention that the nomadic tribes of Qashqaei in the south west of Iran still practice the *ta'zieh* of Siyavash, known locally as *Siyavashan* or *Savoushun*. After the Islamic conquest, and with the rise of the Shi'ite movements in Iran, passion plays were mostly infused with religious fables, agonizing life stories of the prophet Mohammad and other religious figures, particularly his grandson and the third Imam, Imam Hussein, and his family who were ambushed and killed or captured by caliph Yazid and his chief commander Shemr.

During the Safavid era (in the 10th century), *ta'zieh* took a theatrical form and thus its popularity grew. It became a Persian Shiite ritual that portrayed mainly various religious myths of the ten-day journey of the prophet's grandchildren in Karbala, along with other related stories. This theatrical convention experienced a temporary decline under Nādir Shah's[9] reign, but it was glorified during the Zandīyih Dynasty (11th century) once more. Towards the end of the Qajar era in the twentieth century, the Qajar kings and authorities, as well as wealthy merchants and bazaaris sponsored this dramatic form. Therefore, *ta'zieh* developed to become a main form of entertainment in all Iranian cities and villages. *Ta'zieh*, by then, had been transformed

into a sumptuous and complex performing art consisting of a script (*ta'zieh nameh*), with a rhythmic didactic content, performed by the two groups of *movafegh-khan-ha* who play *oliya'* (the Imam and his entourage) and *mukhālif-khān-hā* who play *ashqīya'* (the enemy's party). *Muvafiq-khān-hā* deliver rhythmic and poetical speeches. They are normally represented by black, green, or white sets of clothes. *Mukhālif-khān-hā*, on the other hand, merely shout by using an unrefined language and a fierce tone. Their performance is highly exaggerated and they look dramatically comical. They are marked by their brown or red costumes. Thus, it is fairly easy, on the spectator's part, to recognize "bad guys" from the "good guys" in the first place. There are also a large number of actors who would merely appear in the battlefield but do not have any speeches to deliver. This group is called *siyahī lashkar* (the extras). Both groups along with the musical ensemble that performs the familiar festive, heroic or mourning tunes (that are identified as the *ta'zieh* music for the informed viewers) work under the supervision a director (*ta'zieh gardān* or *mu'īn ul-bukā*). *Ta'zieh gardan's* task, however, is not limited to directing the actors behind the stage. On the contrary, he joins the actors on stage, initiates the play through delivering his introductory lines about the story that is to be performed (*hadīth*), and gives directions to all actors while they are playing. *Ta'zieh* is performed both indoors (in places specifically made for this type of theater called *takiyih* or *hussainiyih*) and outdoors. It was during the Qajar epoch that *ta'zieh* encompassed other forms of folk tales such as complementary plays that are known as *goosheh*, or the satirical play, usually performed after the main *ta'zieh*. Furthermore, the women's *ta'zieh* was later added to the family of *Ta'zieh* Theater. Women performed this form of play (mostly in the

Qajar era) exclusively for the female viewers. Women of importance in each city held women's *ta'ziehs*. The main theme of these passion plays is protesting against injustice, fighting evil, and not abiding with oppressive forces. The protagonist of *ta'zieh* chooses to die rather than live under a dictatorship. During the Pahlavi era, *ta'zieh* was banned as a form of "backward" traditional theater.[10] At the present time, although this form of theater does not enjoy the government or clerics' support, it is once again being revived. The modern performances are not as glamorous as they used to be under the Qajars. Moreover, many famous *tekyiehs*, including Tekiyeh-ye Dowlat in Tehran, the second biggest one in the country (after Isfahan's *tekiyeh*), have been destroyed or abandoned.

Through a non-realist approach, *ta'zieh* narrates a well-known story to its audiences. Dramatic overstatement and exaggeration – which are in turn borrowed from another rather older theatrical tradition, *naqqālī* – is an integral part of the play with dramatic irony as its core prerequisite. Therefore, the spectator anticipates what is about to happen in the play. Still, it invokes emotional reactions among the Shiite audiences, since it touches upon significant ideological and moral values of this minority group of Muslims. It is this highly spiritual and emotional connection with play that makes *ta'zieh* a unique example of World Theater. At the same time, this form of theatrical performance provokes a distancing effect. The spectators generally attend *ta'zieh* to get entertained. In the beginning, they look joyful and ready to participate in a festive event. However, when the play starts, the spectators would weep and express their tremendous grief over the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his devoted apostles, as well as the imprisonment of the rest of his family members. By

the end of *ta'zieh*, especially when the amusing *goosheh* starts, the audience is resettled and the festive mood comes back once again. This detachment effect does not merely apply to the spectators of passion plays. On the contrary, it is as significant on the performers' side. During a play actors switch identities to their real selves to show their sorrow, weep, and talk about the events of Karbala. They may even take a break, in the middle of the play, to drink tea or talk to their fellow performers in front of the crowd. It is particularly the main *mokhalef-khan* antagonist, Shemr, who makes personal comments in the midst of *ta'zieh*. Shemr, who is dressed in his dark red attire, yells and mimics the act of killing, but normally in a comic fashion. He abandons his role temporarily, however, to show his grief by weeping and making empathetic comments. This act, which is to remind the audience that they are watching a performed event, not reality, has a detachment value.

Dramatic irony is at the core of *ta'zieh*. Thus both the performers and the spectators are aware that the piece is just a *performed* event. As opposed to in seamless realist plays and films, the actors in a *ta'zieh* are not meant to be identified with. That is why the actors switch to their real personalities in the middle of the play. Moreover, the actors hold their scripts and are obviously being directed by the *ta'zeih gardan*, not because they do not know their lines or forgot their part in the play but to keep the distancing effect that is a necessary component of this theatrical mode. In addition, the actors easily move on-stage and off-stage as the stage, even in the most elaborated *takiyihs*, is a simple round stage a few steps above the ground where people are usually standing to watch the performance. Since the spectators can see actors coming back and forth to the stage, they are always conscious that *ta'zeih* is merely an

act, or a performance of the real events. This dramatic tension in *ta'zieh* makes it different from realist performances. In fact, many *ta'zieh gardans* are now challenging the influence of Hollywood stylistics in the *ta'zieh* performances. William Beeman and Mohammad B. Ghaffari cite two such examples:

> In *The Ta'ziyeh of Ali Akbar*, a hero, Ali Akbar goes backstage to put on a red-stained shirt and then returns to die in a very stylized manner. In one performance in Tehran seen by Ghaffari, the character playing the villain Shemr stabbed Ali Akbar once. The actor playing Ali Akbar then crawled around the stage for several minutes and Shemr stabbed him again. The scene was taken directly from a Hollywood film, and was so melodramatic that it distracted from the inherent power of the scene.
>
> A performer with the troupe presenting ta'ziyeh in Paris, a rather well-known actor Ghaffari had worked with in Iran, made the role of Hares so melo-dramatic that it was nearly unwatchable. In one scene Hares must kill the children with a knife. The actor extended the scene with the children for almost five minutes, and chose to use a dagger. Ghaffari finally asked him, "What are you doing? Performing surgery?" The actor replied, "This is *work*!" Ghaffari said, "No no, I don't want any dramatic 'work.' Just make the gesture of removing the thorns two times for each child, and lose the dagger". (56-57)

These two extreme examples and the concern of a *ta'zeih gardan* make clear that performing in a *ta'zeih* does not call for melodramatic excess. The impact of this type of drama lies in its simple stylization that makes it an effective and powerful theatrical

form. The experienced actors, who usually inherit their roles from their fathers and are involved in the play from early ages, perform in a non-realist fashion to show the tragic events of Karbala. As Dabashi clarifies in "Ta'zieh as Theater of Protest", this paradoxical tension in *ta'zieh* could disappoint a spectator who views the drama from the Aristotelian point of view that identifies drama with *mimesis* or imitation (94-95). In a mimetic perspective, drama is an imitation of an action. "Aristotelian mimesis is based on similitude" while "ta'zieh is predicated on dissimilitude." (Dabashi, "Ta'zieh", 94).

I discussed in chapter three that *Travelers* is a groundbreaking film in terms of its unique representation of the formal elements of *ta'zieh* in cinema. Although we are dealing with one omniscient camera, the story is told from several perspectives to enlighten the psychological struggles each of the characters have in the process of rediscovering their selves and identities. The camera movements play an important role in conveying this approach. Quite frequently, the camera pans up and down, or horizontally, to focus from one actor to another to change the point of view. The traveling shots make a harmonious balance between the two senses of the "communal" versus "individual" identities that is an ongoing issue in the modern societies. Their collective evolution brings a sense of ritual performance, which is at the core of *ta'zieh*. Like any other ritual, the Ma'arefi family's problematization of their identities signifies, as Bayzai indicates in terms of rituals, "a collective act of creation" (in Dabashi, *Close Up* 78). In a similar fashion, the characters in *Travelers* participate in a collective act in their rethinking of their selves. Furthermore, the monologues performed by each character that recalls the conventional monologues in

ta'zieh reveal each person's questions and struggles. They serve as a means to the discovery of these people's hidden sides. These monologues are also significant in terms of Bayzai's deconstruction of a pure cinematic approach in favor of representing a theatrical approach to film. The highly refined and sophisticated lines the characters perform in the course of the film de-centre the narrative. Thus, the film resonates the stylistics of *ta'zieh* both on the verbal and visual levels.

But the impact of *ta'zieh* on Bayzai's aesthetics is not limited to the formal elements of his stylistics. On the other had, in this director's stylistics, modern issues such as cultural identity, alienation, and the concept of modernity in Iran are aesthetically consolidated with both the formal and philosophical ethos of a ritualistic theater such as *ta'zieh*. As I discussed in chapter three, by employing the rhythm of *ta'zieh* in *Travelers* Bayzai explores these modern issues.

What makes *ta'zieh* a unique theatrical convention is its masterful fusion of the two incongruous concepts of history and performance. Thus, in *ta'zieh*, fact and fiction become interrelated. Because of its highly stylized approach, this type of theater is non-realistic. Paradoxically though, *ta'zieh* is also a realistic form of theater since it reveals significant historical events to its Shiite spectators. The same artistic consolidation of the real and the unreal or fact/history and fiction is at the heart of Bayzai's aesthetics. *The Death of Yazd-gird* for instance, portrays his masterful rehistoricizing of a historical event in a theatrical manner.

From the very beginning of the film, *The Death of Yazd-gird* starts by challenging the history. Before the first scene starts, the spectator sees a "historical quotation" that reads: "Thus Yazd-gird fled to Marv and entered a mill. The miller,

tempted by the king's money and jewelry, murdered him while Yazd-gird was sleeping" The source of this historical evidence is vaguely mentioned as "*tarikh!* (history!)". The film is a fictional account of the last king of the Sassanid dynasty, Yazd-gird, who fled the capital city of Tisfoun in the wake of the Arab conquest. Disguised in a patched garment, Yazd-gird takes refuge in a miller's house, which is basically a mill. The miller, who recently lost a son in an unwanted war, lives in extreme poverty with his wife and daughter. Their mere hope, in the midst of the empire's chaos is now the "king of kings, Yazd-gird shah, the earthly representative of the God, Ahura Mazda", who is going to protect them from the invading enemy. The story begins when the king's entourage enters the mill and finds a dead body that is suspected to be the king's. The death of the king, however, is under investigation because the commanders are not completely certain if this is the king's body, as they have never seen his face without the royal mask and attire. We are told in the film that the shah, by the end of the Sassanid era, was considered a divine figure and no human being was allowed to look at his bare face without a mask. Since the body does not have a mask or the royal attire, the commanders are not sure if this is the dead king's corpse. As a result, they decide to set a trail in order to find out the truth. The accounts given by the miller's family are controversial. In various hearings, the miller, his wife, or the girl describes the reality in different ways: 1) the king murdered the miller and is now disguised in the miller's garment. 2) The miller murdered the king because he raped his daughter and seduced his wife. In fact, they claim that he raped and seduced the daughter and wife to encourage the miller to kill him. 3) The king committed suicide. 4) The king is still alive. The trail does not come to a firm conclusion.

Therefore, the film finishes inconclusive in terms of the truth about Yazd-gird's life after he is overthrown. This could suggest that the historical evidence of those who write history or judge it is partial and incomplete.

The Death of Yazd-gird is a ritualistic assemblage to elucidate a hazy moment in history. The shah's commanders set a trail to find the truth about their defeated king. When they are told about the king's crimes and sins, they automatically lose their legitimate position as judges. On the other hand, these commanders constantly become the subject of the miller's family's questions and criticism. They are being accused of abandoning their leader and being unfair to them/their subjects. After a while, it is paradoxically the king's associates who are the accused. The miller family calls them usurpers of power who should answer to the oppressed people. Since the king has committed crimes, he has lost his legitimate power (*farr'i kiyānī*), even to his commanders.[11] By the end of the film, they set a gallows to execute not the miller, but the body of the king.

In the cinematic scale, Bayzai's *The Death of Yazd-gird* is a (fictive) response that seeks to re-write history into a story (*Afsānih*). Similarly, in the historical scale, Bayzai's narrative highlights and dramatizes a historical event that has remained ambiguous. According to various historical accounts, Yazd-gird III was the twenty-five or thirty-four year old emperor of the Sassanid dynasty when he was killed. It is "confirmed" that his death took place in 31 A.H.; however, the murderer or murderers as well as the motive behind his murder and the way he was killed are the subjects of disagreement in different accounts. For instance, as Mohammad Tahami-nejad reveals, in Bal'amy's historical account, Yazd-gird, accompanied by a few members

of his family, his chef, butlers, and slaves goes to the city of Marv. It is the governor of Marv, Mahouyeh, who allied himself with Amir Baad Qeys, killed Yazd-gird in a mill (413). In *Rawza-tu Safā* by Mir-Khūnd, on the other hand, Māhū'i Sūrī, the governor of Marv invites the Khaqān (King) of China to Marv in the wake of the dismantling of the Sassanid's empire. Yazd-gird who resides in Marv then, learns about this incident and flees to a mill. The miller, who is tempted by the king's magnificent attire and jewelry, murders him and throws his body in the water (Tahami-nejad 413). These are only two accounts of Yazd-gird's death. Other modern and ancient historians, such as Zabih ul-llāh Safa, Abbas Eghbal Ashtiyani, and Firdawsī, have explained this event in different ways. Bayzai's dramatic version of the death of Yazd-gird not only highlights the differences on this historical incident but also re-historicizes it in the sense that, for the first time, it is the oppressed (*mazlūm*) that comments on this event.

This film re-historicizes the death of Yazd-gird in a ritualistic approach, which recalls the formation of *ta'zieh* in the Safavid era. It was important for the first Shiite dynasty in Iran to construct different images and a set of historically significant myths that could smooth the progress of their legitimization. The development of *ta'zieh*, in this sense, was a necessary move as this type of theater re-historicized the death of Imam Hussein and his family underlined this event as an important historical milestone for the Shiites. The central theme of *ta'zieh* is an emphasis on the concept of *mazlūmiyat* (being wronged) attributed to the Imam and his followers. Through establishing a dramatic convention that began by the first Shiite dynasty in Iran in the tenth century, the Safavids encouraged *ta'zieh* because it narrates the story of Karbala

from the perspective of those who were being wronged, not from the oppressor's point of view. The spectators, in this theatrical form, weep for Imam's *mazlūmiyat* (because he was wronged) by Caliph Yazid. The Shiites call themselves the descendents of the prophet's grandson who was the subject of Yazid's oppression (*zulm*). Their rewriting of history, in the form of a theater, from the *mazlūm*'s perspective legitimized and strengthened the principles that were vital to Shiism. As a non-realistic theatrical mode, *ta'zieh* is not taken as reality. But the incidents that it depicts in a non-realistic fashion, for instance, the Imam's murder and his *mazlūmiyat* are alarming and awakening for the spectator.

In a similar fashion, the story of Yazd-gird, as Bayzai narrates it, is a fictionalized version of the "reality" of the king's death event. In a number of occasions, the characters in the film emphasize the fact that this is merely an *Afsānih* or a story. Nonetheless, it is not relevant if what Bayzai depicts is fact or fiction. What is significant, on the other hand, is that this different version of reality narrated by those who were never reflected in the official historical accounts. This makes the spectator of the film conscious about history and the way it is constructed. Moreover, the highly stylized and dramatic performance in *The Death of Yazd-gird* that is reminiscent of *ta'zieh* makes the spectator aware that this is merely a performed event. Instead of a realist and/or melodramatic performance, the actors play in an overstated and exaggerated manner. Therefore, the viewer is not drawn into a mimetic action, which is taken as reality, and thus stays free to review not a "historical" event but a "tragic" event of history. In *The Death of Yazd-gird*, the viewer does not confront the dead characters of a finished historical account. On the contrary, he or she deals with

live figures that are still being challenged and questioned. Thus, these characters are the subjects of further judgments. This matter makes the narrative engaging and inspiring in the sense that, like a *ta'zieh*, the film consolidates death and life to revive its historical/fictional figures.

Bayzai's *The Death of Yazd-gird* is portrayed mostly within the confines of a mill. Besides, the scenes that illustrate outside of the mill are taken as if they are seen through the door or the windows of the mill. This film was made in 1983, after an unsettling revolution and during a devastating war with Iraq. It is probable that since Bayzai had a limited budget, he was forced to shoot the entire movie in the mill. The reason for this matter may be an economical or an aesthetic one. The end result, in any event, is portraying the events in a constrained space. The setting, like a *ta'zieh* stage, is plain and simple. In the absence of an elaborated *mise-en-scène*, the spectator's attention is drawn into the psychology of characters and the speeches that they deliver (Nafisi 397). Furthermore, the narrow circle of the shooting stage enhances the distancing effect that is central to *ta'zieh* plays. As a result, the *mise-en-scène* in *The Death of Yazd-gird* does not create the illusion of a real space. On the other hand, the film's setting more or less resembles a theatrical stage not a cinematic setting. Similar to a staged play, the changes of the setting are only manipulated through lighting. As Azar Nafisi indicates:

> The bare setting of the film is filled with the characters, but these characters, on the other hand, are presented as abstract characters. They are not portrayed as individuals. It is not their individuality, but their character (*mahīyat*) that is at stake here. They are not given any names but titles,

> such as *Padeshāh* (king), commander, general, *mubid* (priest), the miller, woman, girl, and soldier. Thus their names are dissolved into the roles they should play. (397)

The Death of Yazd-gird employs the theatrical elements of a rich Iranian dramatic convention, *ta'zieh*, to signify how a performance could substitute and/or rehistoricize the history. This performance/play/film reveals a type of reality that both thematically and formally resists to be equated as a historical reality. History is usually taken as the truth. But performance, especially a non-realistic performance, has no such ambition. Bayzai's *performed* version of a historic event that has been the subject of controversy and disagreement re-historicizes this event and reinforces that history is merely another Afsānih or fiction that has been created by those who possess the power. By the end of the film, when they are preparing the gallows to execute the miller, the woman prophesies the approaching of the Moslim troupes. Then the general articulates this matter when he says: "the story (Afsānih) is going to be the one that this family narrated. Let's hang this dead body, instead". On the other hand, the commander interrupts the trail (of history) altogether and says: "Let's just move. It is always the winners who write the history." In any event, Bayzai's fiction disturbs the winners' history, or at least makes the spectators rethink and revisit history. In Bayzai's version of the death of Yazd-gird, the ending does not bring a clear conclusion to the fate of these characters. As the woman indicates in the last sequence, "Now the main judges are on their way. You had a white flag, yet this was your sentence. We should only wait to see what is the judgment of those who carry a black

flag". In this way, *The Death of Yazd-gird* remains in a moment of uncertainty to further deconstruct the illusion of a fixed and clear-cut reality.

The Death of Yazd-gird was screened in a very sensitive moment in the Iranian history, only four years after the Islamic revolution. The title of Bayzai's film promised a revolutionary film in tune with the government's objectives. While in the first years after the revolution, the Islamic government denounced cinema as a Western and corrupt medium, in the following years it started to invest in making propagandistic films to promote Islamic values, their imposed social changes, and the war whose duration, paradoxically, turned out to be vital to the Islamic government's survival. The film was produced by Channel Two of the National Television Broadcast and was premiered at the first Fajr Festival in 1983. This was, ironically, the very last screening of the film inside Iran. It is worth noting that, during the Islamic revolution, the revolutionaries constructed an image of themselves as the Moslim warriors who finally put an end to two thousand and five hundred years of kingship and corruption in Iran. This image was similar to what people had in mind about the Arab conquerors, who defeated the Sassanid empire and replaced it with an Islamic empire that ruled over Persia for centuries. The portrayal of these Arab invaders, in Bayzai's film, as "those who would neither salute nor say farewell, neither ask nor listen to answers but talk with their swords" was not a desirable image for those who were to put an end to a "corrupt kingship." Besides, although *The Death of Yazd-gird* demoralized the image of the last king of the Persian empire to some extent – which was celebrated by Mohammad Reza Shah in different occasions including his lavish coronation, as the descendent of the great Persian kings, in the

ruins of Persepolis – it did not glorify the image of the Moslim newcomers either. Their arrival to Persia, in this film, is portrayed as the onset of uncertainty, death, and misery. The commander articulates this matter: "All absurd! Surrinder to death that is waiting on the threshold. Indefinite, like the sands in a sandstorm that darkens the eyes of the world."

At this time, the insecure Islamic republic was not an established government yet as it was still struggling with the dissident organizations and groups inside and outside of Iran. The chief authorities in the government were being assassinated. Universities were closed as a result of student upheavals. Moreover, the Iranian government was (originally) involuntarily involved in a war with Iraq. Being criticized through an artistic work, especially a film by a prominent filmmaker such as Bayzai, was so overwhelming that they banned the film altogether.

During the revolution and the war, the powerful discourses of *ta'zieh* were constructive forces in terms of the public psyche and changed the course of events in favor of the Islamists. As Dabashi asserts:

> During the Islamic Revolution, the figure of Khomeini was immediately identified with that of Hussein, or even more poignantly with a conflated figure of Muhammad, Ali, and Hussein – which is to say with the most combatant saintly figures in the Islamic universe of creative imagination. By the same token, the Shah was identified with Yazid, a usurper of power, corrupt, tyrannical, banal, and demonic. The configuration of the protagonist and the antagonist in this drama transformed the battle between

> Khomeini and Shah into a simulacrum of the battle of Karbala, in which a new generations of Muslems could actually participate. ("Ta'zieh" 95-96)

In a similar fashion, Saddam, a Sunni Moslim in Iraq – a land which used to be Yazid's kingdom – was identified with Yazid and was even called in the Iranian media "Saddam Yazid" instead of Saddam Hussein. This modern Yazid figure, according to the Iranian propagandist media, restaged the history in his battle with Khomeini/Hussein and the true Islamic – that is, Iranian – warriors.

Bayzai, on the other hand, employed the discourse of *ta'zieh* in *The Death of Yazd-gird* mostly for artistic purposes rather than political ones. His use of the rhythm of *ta'zieh*, as a powerful means of articulation cost him the banning of his film. Ironically, the employing of the same formal and thematic elements of *ta'zieh*, which was manipulated by the revolutionaries, made this *non-realistic* film too powerful and evocative to be screened and viewed as a pure fictional work with no historical or social implications.

Real Place, Imagined Spaces: "Dreaming Consciousness"[12]

In Bayzai's filmmaking, space is consciously treated as a dialogical and heterogeneous concept. In the diegetic world of his films, the past is juxtaposed with the present and reality is intermingled with imagination in both the rural and urban places his films represent. This unprecedented juxtaposition of the past and present, or reality and dreams, problematizes the presumption of the coherent and homogeneous world most of us tend to construe in our minds. The space in Bayzai's films resembles a Persian garden or a Persian carpet – by the way the latter one is an artistic reproduction of the former one. Like a Persian garden, Bayzai's films represent an

enclosed space in which different and at times contrasting elements are consolidated. This enclosed space denotes the cosmos in its entirety that contains diverse elements. Its structure encompasses a place for spiritual solace as well as a social space in which people interact and communicate. Bayzai's garden-like space is also reminiscent of Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia that conflates the imaginative and real spaces. In a seminal lecture that was later published as "Of Other Spaces" Foucault announces:

> The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another; thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space .... (233)

The particular type of heterotopic world that Bayzai's aesthetics evokes is created through "the magic of cinema." Through cinematic techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, montage, and *decoupage* several spaces could be merged into one real place. In Bayzai's films, *mise-en-scène* and editing, in particular, are significant in the sense that they invest meaning by bringing specific spatial auras to each film. The foggy setting in *The Stranger and the Fog*, for instance, enhances the characters' uncertainty in regards to their identities. Furthermore, the theatrical stage-like *mise-en-scène* in *The Death of Yazd-gird* and the fast traveling shots in *Travelers* invoke a dramatic mode as opposed to a seamless reality approach to filmmaking that tries to imitate the "real" life situations.

As my discussions in this chapter represent, in films such as *Perhaps Some Other Time* and *The Death of Yazd-gird*, the spectator could not find, what Foucault calls, "a hierarchic ensemble of places" (231). As opposed to a "space of emplacement" where, for instance, dream and reality or history and story are hierarchically and systematically separated, in Bayzai's films these once segregated notions are intermingled. In *Perhaps Some Other Time* the spaces of dreams and reality are interwoven to dissolve the past into the present. In *The Death of Yazd-gird* the fusions of fact and fiction or formal versions of history and an artistic interpretation of history disturb the systematic and constructed hierarchy of places. The end result of these merging and fusing of incompatible sites is the formation of a specific space in Bayzai's films that does not match the real place. On the contrary, it invokes imagined spaces that could reunite long time disconnected concepts such as myth and history.

The imagined spaces that Bayzai's movies aestheticize are not neutral. Throughout chapters three and four, I have brought examples of the way the editing, music, choice of cinematic settings such as the domestic and social spaces, lighting, and so forth function as spatial signifiers and invest meaning in the films. The imagined spaces of Bayzai's films occur within the sphere of both the internal and external spaces. To schematize the internal and external spaces, I have used Henri Lefebvre's definition of space. In his article, "The Production of Space," Lefebvre formulates the notion of space as a concept that bears more than a mere physical signification, where he states:

> [T]he aim is to discover or construct a theoretical unity between "fields" which are apprehended separately, just as molecular, electromagnetic, and gravitational forces are in physics. The fields we are concerned with are, first, the physical – nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the mental, including logical and formal abstractions; and, thirdly, the social. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomenon, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias (133).

According to Lefebvre's definition, the concept of space could not be reduced to the physical space. The spatial aura in any novel, poem, or film is grasped through a combination of physical, mental and social elements in each text. Thus, two films shot in the same place, could bring entirely different spatial paradigms to the screen. For example, both Louis Feuillade's *Les vampires* (1915) and Jean Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) have chosen Paris as their shooting location. However, in *Les vampires* Paris is characterized as a real location – though from a surrealist perspective – while *Alphaville*'s imagined location is not Paris but an imaginary futuristic place. Both of the above-mentioned films are shot in the same physical place, but the mental and social spaces they represent are different.

The mental space is the space of our dreams and passions. It is the internal space in which we imagine and re-imagine. The social space, on the other hand, primarily deals with the external world of our social practice, although it is impacted by the projection of our imagination. These imagined internal and external worlds in

Bayzai's films take precedence over the immediate physical space. Thus, they usually do not fit in any real geographical place. On the contrary, they serve as signifiers that produce specific meanings. In Bayzai's films, the physical space is either an urban or rural place on the actual geographical map. However, these real places portray an imaginary space.

In films, such as *The Ballad of Tara* and *The Stranger and the Fog*, the location consciously signifies an imaginary space. The physical setting in *The Ballad of Tara* and *The Stranger and the Fog* is the northern region of Iran by the Caspian Sea. In both of these films, however, the costumes are chosen from diverse areas and do not match a certain ethnographical place. In a similar fashion, the choice of music does not signify Gilaki or Mazandarani music. On the other hand, the music in these films is selected from a variety of different parts of Iran. In addition, Bayzai employs Japanese music in his films. These different spaces and places are brought together to signify the universality of the questions and challenges the characters in these films encounter.

In other films, such as *The Crow* and *Perhaps Some Other Time*, the social and mental spaces are changing between the present time and the past. Bayzai's filmmaking portrays the historical sites, like Darb'i Bagh'i Millī (The Public Garden Gate), in *The Crow* to dramatize the significance of the past in defining the concepts of self and identity in the present social places. Bayzai's characters travel from the present to the past not to take refuge in the past but to show their modern concerns. The conflating of history with present time reveals the relevance of the past to modernity.

The spatial spheres in Bayzai's films that juxtapose different sites and modes are decisive in terms of the construction of meaning. Therefore, the space, urban or rural, is highlighted as a protagonist, a protagonist that is partly real and partly imaginary. He sets spatial paradigms, which signify the questions that confront humans as general, not those that would concern the people of a specific geographical region. In this sense, Bayzai's films should be approached not only from a nationalist perspective, but also from a humanist and universal perspective. For instance, the question of identity that is portrayed in films such as *Travelers* and *Perhaps Some Other Time* is a universal question that relates to the modern self. In these two films, through the infusion of dreams and/or magical realist moments, Bayzai represents the internal spaces of his characters and their struggles with their selves and identities.

Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* has represented that because of the power of imagination we live in a heterogeneous world imbued by images. Therefore, we are surrounded not by, for example, dead historical accounts or sterile dreams, but by dynamic and moving images created in the imagined spaces that could metamorphose our state of existence. As I discussed, in *Perhaps Some Other Time* the internal space of Kiyan's dreaming is portrayed by different cinematic techniques such as the change of camera point of view and the movement of characters and camera within space. In this film, as in many other films by Bayzai, the employing of the – American style – continuity editing and – European style – mobile camera movement and montage enhances a dynamic spatial paradigm. *Perhaps Some Other Time*, builds the image of a disturbed internal space that is closely related to the social and physical spaces of the characters. The portrayal of Kiyan's problematized internal space is directly

associated with the recovery of the social facts about her identity. The merging of dreams and history into reality creates an alternative form of reality that is not a replacement for what we normally perceive as reality. This new reality which is the result of an artistic conflation of the various external places and internal spaces is reminiscent of Proust's analysis of the roses painted by Elstir when he says: "[these roses are] a new variety with which this painter, like some clever horticulturalist, had enriched the Rose family" (quoted in Bachelard xxix).

In Bayzai's aesthetics, imagination functions as a form of consciousness. It is through imagination that history and art/fiction, reality and dreams are put together. Thus imagination in his films is not suppressed but celebrated. In the filmic heterotopia that Bayzai constructs, images invoke a creative movement. Bayzai portrays, reproduces, and alternates these images to reconcile the past with modernity. These images do not signify a coherent and complete world, but an ever-changing universe in which the heterogeneous imagination remembers the past and screens the present. Bayzai's aesthetics displaces the past and present, as well as dreams and reality but it makes us to get prepared to embrace a more dynamic future. Because through his empowering of the imagination, we as spectators realize that better dreaming is key to have a better reality in the future.

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[1] There is also a similar movement in other artistic venues. Refer to Daryush Shayegan's "At the Cutting Edge of Intersecting Worlds" in Issa Rose's *Iranian Contemporary Art*, pp 9-11.

[2] This matter is discussed in chapter three, where I have examined *Travelers*.

[3] This is an online article in *Senses of Cinema:* http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/05/37/muriel.html.

[4] All these three sources are in Qukasian's *Anthology of Articles and Critical Works on Bahram Bayzai.*

[5] Among the early 20th century historians whose texts are regarded as the "canonical" history books, are Ahmad Kasravi, Fereidoun Adamiyat, and Mehdi Malekzadeh.

[6] Mehdi Malekzadeh. *Tarikh-e Enghelab-e Mashrootiyat-e Iran*. 3 vols. 1949-1954. Reprint. Tehran: Elmi, 1985.

[7] The younger directors who tackled gender issues are Rakhshan Bani Etemad and Farzaneh Milani.

[8] The translation from Persian is mine.

[9] As Nader Shah was a Sonni Moslem.

[10] Most of the information in this paragraph was gathered from Bayzai's *Theater in Iran* pages 113-56).

[11] According to Zoroastrianism, *farr-e kiyani* is the divine power, endowed to a king, which legitimizes his authority. As soon as a king commits an offense, *farr-e kiyani* leaves the king and the leader would naturally lose his or her authority.

[12] I have adopted this term from Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (xvi).

Conclusion

Iranian Poetic Cinema: Responding to the Shrill Cry of the Sīmurgh

This dissertation has attempted to contextualize the poetics of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema within the larger context of Persian imagery by representing the impact of Persian culture and arts in the creation of a cinema that has received enormous attention around the world over the past decade. Informed by the legacy of Persian culture, the post-revolutionary cinema became the dominant form of cultural expression in terms of reception in Iran and one of the *major* non-Eurocentric cinemas of the world. In order to represent the relations between Iranian cinema and the cultural systems, my dissertation has concentrated on the filmmaking stylistics of two Iranian directors. In chapters one and two, I discussed the non-linear approach of Kiarostami's filmmaking influenced by classical and modern Persian poetry. I also dedicated two chapters to the mosaic pattern of Bayzai's films that reflect myth, and history, tradition and modernity. My discussions in these chapters depict that Iranian cinema is enriched by its indigenous cultural archetypes. This matter, however, does not delimit Iranian cinema within its local – or national – consciousness. On the contrary, Iranian cinema, as the dominant cultural form of expression in today's Iran, overlaps the imagined borders we tend to attribute to any particular national cinema or art form. Thus, this national cinema is now established in the "in-between spaces," as Homi Bhabha calls them, of transnational zones. This overlapping and crisscrossing could not be reduced to merely cinematic subject matters.[1] On the other hand, this crossing occurs in the realm of production, distribution, and reception of Iranian films.

Iranian cinema, like a few other non-Western artistic forms such as Latin American magical realist novels, created new hybrid sensibilities and has gained an international status. It represents a "peripheral" art form that can move towards the center.

Although the impact of the global influences – including world cinema, and more specifically European cinema – is significant factors in the rising of poetic cinema in Iran, it is primarily in dialogue with Persian aesthetics. In the case of the films that I have explored in this dissertation, Persian poetry and the conventions of Iranian performing arts are significant factors in shaping art cinema. Moreover, as I have discussed in various occasions, the Islamic revolution in 1978 has had a profound effect on the aesthetic evolution of cinema in Iran. The revolution in the 1970s furthered the gaps between the (visible) political space and the artistic inner space. Generally speaking, political revolutions always influence cultural aspects of their societies. Thus, the impact of the revolution on Iranian society is not an exception in this regard. Besides, political revolts and revolutions worldwide affect artistic forms of expression, both in the regional and international scales. In "Framing National Cinemas," Hayward's commentary in terms of the Western revolts of the 1960s provides an example in this regard:

> … [T]he 'enfranchisment' of voices/cultures … is also an effect of … the post 1960s in the West, the 1960s revolt against the lack of tolerance of difference that prevailed before. If we look at the pre-1960s discourses it is clear what a profound effect the 1960s had nations-wide and internationally. The social revolution of the 1960s created gaps and legitimate spaces for diversification and the

> possibility of *multi*culturalism – gaps which are constantly being renegotiated. (95)

Similarly, in the post-revolutionary Iran, Iranian cinema underwent an aesthetic evolution. This evolution was originally channeled (by the Islamic state) towards creating an Islamic cinema. But, as I discussed before, the state's attempts to monopolize power and its attempts to recreate a monological culture that could bring a sense of (Islamic) wholeness and continuity with Iran's Islamic past failed. In contrast, Iranian cultural forms of expression, including cinema, showed an incredible diversity in terms of illustrating identity, class, gender, and ethnicity issues. Bayzai's films, for instance, problematize gender conventions and history. In a different way, the exclusion of women in many of Kiarostami's films question the social gender exclusion in post-revolutionary Iran. Paradoxically, the body of critical works and debates about this (deliberate) exclusion made women included and being *seen* not on screen but off screen within the inner zone of the spectators' imaginations. This artistic diversity, in turn, allowed for a fragmentary social structure. Cinema as the most popular form of intellectual discourse and entertainment illustrates this multiplicity and challenges the practices of the dominant ideology in Iran.

My examination of Kiarostami's and Bayzai's aesthetics shows that in the building of a national cinema – with transnational sensibilities – the Iranian art cinema is more engaged in (re)negotiating the cultural and literary aspects than the current political ideologies. This is a legacy from the Persian cultural systems that is charged with a unique metaphorical poetics. Persian culture has a significant literary dimension that needs to be addressed in any cultural studies of Iran. This literary

dimension is intermingled with the social, religious, theoretical, (and arguably) political elements of Iranian culture. For instance, ancient Persian manuscripts such as *Avistā, Shāhnāmih* (and its older version, *Khuday Nāmag*), *One Thousand and One Nights* (and its older version, *Hizār Afsān*), and *Kalīlih va Dimnih* present their words of wisdom in a symbolic and allegorical language with parallel constructions. Furthermore, this symbolic language informed the medieval poetic genres such as Rumi's *mathnavī* and Hafez's *ghazal* poetry as well as narrative genres such as the *hikāyats* (anecdotal tales) of Sa'di's *Bustān*. The employing of metaphorical poetics merely is not limited to literary and religious works. On the contrary, the abundance of symbols, metaphors, similes, and other forms of language games inform equally the Persian philosophical debates. Persian philosophical discourses (intermingled with religious discourses) such as Zoroastrianism, *tasawuf* (the school of Sufism), and *Ishrāq* (illuminationism) benefit from the richness of figures of speech and linguistic analogies. This highly metaphorical language found its way to everyday conversations, in the form of parable imagery and parabolic logic, verses, metaphors, and similes. The linguistic games in Persian culture that employ the language of birds (for instance in Farid o-din Attar's *Mantiq o-Tayr* [*The Conference of Birds*]) ants, salamanders, foxes, lions, and scorpions (in *Kalīlih va Dimnih*, for instance) have entertained Iranian readers and spectators in all forms of oral and written artistic conventions since, at least, the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian era.

Hence, it is no surprise to witness the significant role of Persian metaphorical poetics in modern literature and cinema. In the age of mass culture, it is, once again, these enduring cultural features and values that take precedence over politics. This

literary heritage in Persian culture lends itself to the creation of a symbolical cinema that favors ambiguity over precision. The element of ambiguity in Iranian art cinema is a premeditated choice that stems from the Persian cultural values with highly mystic potentials. As Michael Fischer has written in terms of Persian culture:

> The mystic potentials in the mythos were developed primarily by Islamic thinkers, again with parallels in Neoplatonism in the West and the Upanishads in India. Beyond the mysticism itself, however, is the remarkable sensitivity to and skill with language, especially metaphor and symbol. Language often constraints and limits thought: it is a convention, a code, a system of difference which facilitates ordinary communication by making routine, repetitive, or probable certain kinds of implication, association, and logic. And yet language has the capacity to point beyond itself, to show its own limitations, and to construct meaningful locutions not constrained by conventional logic. (20-21)

The linguistic games, thus, stretch the potentials of the language and compensate for its constraints. This feature, in the modern era, is transferred from its original linguistic form to the cinematic vista. It resulted in the establishing of an ambiguous cinematic stylistics whose medium is the image/*seen* but whose main emphasis is on the substance that is *unseen*. Therefore, the poetic cinema does not entirely reside in the illustrated images on screen. In contrast, Iranian art cinema relies on the allegorical meanings (the unseen) that are derived from images (the seen). In the previous chapters, I discussed how the employing of Persian poetry and the Iranian visual arts have created metaphorical films loaded with the unseen conceptions that

could be deciphered (in various ways) by the spectator. Thus this metaphorical aesthetics is, to a great extent, based on the spectators who would (theoretically) complete the meaning of a film. The concept of the unseen, which informs Iranian art cinema and other forms of artistic expression in the modern era, is a pre-Islamic conception that was later developed in the systematic mystical philosophy of *Ishrāq* (illuminationism).

The shaping of *falsafeh-ye Ishrāq* or illuminationist philosophy was a response to Ibn Sina's (or Aviccena's) *hikma al-mustashriqyya* (eastern philosophy). This philosophical school was developed and redefined by Shahāb i-din Yahyā Suhrivardī[2] sheikh-al Ishrāq (master of illumination) in the 12th century. Suhrivardī was a Persian philosopher who composed over fifty works in less than the forty years of his lifetime (thirty six years to be exact). There are four major works (in Arabic) by Suhrivardī where he engages with the philosophy of illuminationism (Ziai 9). These works include *al Talwihat* (*The Intimations*), *al Muqawamat* (*The Opposites*), *al-Mashari wa'l-Mutarahat* (*The Paths and Havens*), and *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (*Philosophy of illumination*). Suhrivardī was executed by Salah i-din (who is famous in European literature as Saladin) in Allepo, in northern Syria. The illuminationist philosophy, as defined by Suhrivardī, challenges the Aristotelian-oriented philosophy of Peripateticism (*falsafah al-mashsha'iyya*) – explored, elaborated, and then criticized by Ibn Sina – that was based on "the absolute, unchanging, and universal validity" (Ziai and Leaman 701) of the truth that is, in this theorem, discoverable. According to the *Ishrāqiyoun* (illuminationists), on the other hand, the "future event could not be deduced at the present time *and* given universal validity" (Ziai and Leaman 701). In

illuminationism, essence is more important than existence and intuitive knowledge (*elm al-huduri* or knowledge-by-presence) is more significant than representational knowledge (*elm al-hosuli*) that relies on the cognitive reason (*'aql*) (Ziai 149). The intuitive knowledge is acquired immediately and atemporally. As Ziai asserts:

> For Suhrawardi, one does not proceed to know a thing by analyzing it ..., but by having an intuitive grasp of its total reality and then analyzing the intuition. This means that the philosophy of illumination is founded on visions and mystical experiences of the whole of reality and not on defining the multiple things *in* reality. (130)

The illuminationist philosophy validates a "continuum of reality" instead of an absolute reality. This continuum of reality consists of intellect, soul, matter, and a fourth realm named *alam al-khiyal* or *alam al-mithal* – translated as *mundus imaginalis* by Corbin (Corbin 1971). In this realm, "objects possess shape and extent but not material substance" (Fischer 136). It is an imaginative inter-world that is as revealing and illuminating as "reality". The intuitive knowledge is acquired only if one examines *alam al-khiyal*. In this way, the person would become illuminated by an immediate knowledge. This is how light and illumination become metaphorically significant in the whole continuum of reality.

In a small treatise entitled "Nafīr'i Sīmurgh" [3] ("The Shrill Cry of Sīmurgh"), Suhrivardī describes the notion of illumination in an allegorical language by using the symbolic diction of Persian literature.[4] This metaphoric account indicates that in the spring, which is the time of the rejuvenation of nature, the hoopoe[5] becomes a

Sīmurgh. The shadow of its wings cures and its cry provides knowledge to the few who *listen*. Thus, it is the shrill cry of the legendary Simorgh that brings spiritual illumination and immediate knowledge. In the philosophy of illumination, Suhrivardī consolidates the language games, mythology, and theoretical ontology to develop a philosophical statement. According to this philosophy, "[t]he receiving of divine glory radiates in persons as divine light (*farra'i izadi*) and empowers miraculous acts. The opening of the inner-eye of wisdom allows one to participate in the 'eighth clime' (*al-iqlim al-thamin*) that interzone of 'alam al-mithal or *'alam al-khayal* (*mundus imaginalis*)" (Fischer 143). *Ishrāq* has had a profound impact on Iranian culture. It was one of the main philosophical discourses that fostered and legitimized Shiism in Iran. Similarly, it has nurtured Sufism, which is another Iranian philosophy.[6]

In the realm of poetic cinema, the illuminationist ontology unites with the metaphorical aspect of Persian language to fashion an allegorical cinema that is represented in the filmmaking of directors such as Bayzai and Kiarostami. The Iranian poetic cinema is highly symbolic. Therefore, the main emphasis in this cinema is on the unseen paradigm (*'ālam'i ghayb* from an illuminationist perspective) as opposed to the seen imagery. From an illuminationist viewpoint, what is seen could be analyzed by *'aql*: wisdom or scientific knowledge. While this part is basic and important, it does not illuminate the spectator. The spectator, on the other hand, should open his or her inner-eye of wisdom in order to see *'alam-e mithal*. This imaginary world possesses shapes and essence but it does not exist physically. It is merely through an intuitive and immediate knowledge that one can see the significance of a poetic film. The philosophy of *Ishrāq* and its dominion of *'alam-e*

mithal that demands *ilm al-huduri* or knowledge-by-presence in Kiarostami's aesthetics provokes a poetic immediacy and minimalism. His filmmaking evades portraying any absolute knowledge as every conception could be questioned and contradicted. This philosophy is also evident in the allegorical meanings of Bayzai's films that illustrate a micro-*'alam-e mithal* in which imagination is more illuminating than reality and where the filmmaker obliterates the unchanging validity of history and the absolute truth. Iranian cinema accommodates Suhrivardī's *'alam-e mithal* in the sense that it provides an "in-between-space" for a world of images that connects the physical reality with the immaterial world of mind.

What is common in the aesthetics of both directors is the element of uncertainty when they tackle issues such as fact and fiction. In their filmmaking, the spectator cannot find an absolute and unchanging "truth" or "fact." Kiarostami's aesthetic realism mingles fact and fiction. The actors are "real" people, not professional actors, but the situation is "constructed" by the director. It is, thus, merely a "performed" event not reality that we see in his films. On the surface, Bayzai's dramatic aesthetics looks completely different from Kiarostami's realist-evoking stylistics. But it shares the same approach towards what is unconsciously taken for granted as "reality". Bayzai's characters get illuminated regarding their past not through historical accounts but by investigating their inner selves and the domestic/informal spaces. A highly theatrical "performance" in Bayzai's films is more realistic and revealing than the "real" historical texts. The examples that I provided in terms of Bayzai and Kiarostami's aesthetics are merely a few instances of the many occasions they question reality or the absolute truth. I have provided more evidence in the body of

this dissertation, though. In any event, both these directors question more frequently than they answer and even when they provide a response to a question, they treat it with *uncertainty*. This approach recalls a passage from Suhrivardī's *The Philosophy of Illumination*, Part One, I, The Seventh Rule:

> Whoever enumerates [all of] the essentials he knows, cannot be confident of not having neglected the existence of another essential, and the person who wants to clarify or contest the statement may ask him about it [the essentials that may have remained undetected]. The person who is constructing a definition cannot, at that point, rightfully say "Were there other attributes [of a thing], I would know them"; for there are numerous attributes that are hidden [and he may have neglected to note them]. And it is not sufficient to say "Should the thing have another essential [hidden to us], we will still be able to know the essence without it." The answer is: "The reality [of a thing] is known only when the sum total of the essentials of it are known." This means that if it is ever possible that [the thing] have another essential that is not perceived, knowledge of reality of the thing cannot be certain. So, it has been made clear that it is impossible to obtain an [essentialist] definition in the way the Peripatetics do [i.e the formula proximate genus plus differentiæ], which is a difficulty even their [the Peripatetics'] master [Aristotle] admits. Therefore we [the illuminationists] only make definition by

> means of things that specify the aggregate, organic whole. (translated by Ziai in Ziai 181-82)

As I mentioned, the philosophy of illuminationism has had a great influence on Iranian culture. The Moslim caliph executed Suhrivardī because his popular ideas were considered a threat to the newly-established government of Salah i-din. Illuminationism changed the dominant Aristotelian-oriented epistemology of Persian thinkers such as Ibn Sina in favor of a philosophy that barely relies on empirical examination and discovery. Furthermore, the philosophy of *Ishrāq* still – subconsciously – informs modern Iranian culture, which is always vigilant regarding the "essential hidden elements" of any matter. In a similar fashion, Iranian art cinema, as I have shown in previous chapters, does not treat the "facts" with unconditional certainty.

After the Islamic revolution, Iranian cinema underwent *evolutionary* changes in its aesthetic pattern and sensibilities that brought an originality and insight. It achieved a remarkable success in local and international venues, as if both the Iranian and transnational spectators *heard* the shrill cry of the imaginary Sīmurgh of Iranian cinema. Iranian films in the post-revolutionary era drew on the poetics of Persian culture and literature. In its Iranian context, as I discussed in this dissertation, cinema is one of the signifiers and agents of modernity. It explores the issues of identity and authenticity in a society that has encountered political and cultural changes. But in doing so, Iranian poetic cinema is, to a great extent, an outgrowth of Persian literary and philosophical discourses deeply embedded in Iranian culture. Suhrivardī, the

master of illumination, better stated this matter in *The Philosophy of Illumination* with which I would bring my conclusion to a close:

> The spiritual luminaries, the wellsprings of kingly splendor and wisdom that Zoroaster told of, and … the good and blessed king Kay-Khusrow unexpectedly beheld in a flash. All the sages of Persia were agreed…. For them, even water possessed an archetype in the heavenly kingdom which they named 'Khordad.' That of trees they named 'Mordad,' and that of fire 'Ordibehesht.' These are the lights to which Empedocles and others [Hermes, Trismegistus, Agathadaemon, Socrates, and Plato] alluded. (translated by Fischer 131)

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[1] For a comprehensive study of the role of Iranian cinema in the West refer to Hamid Naficy's "Cinematic Exchange Relations: Iran and the West" in Iran and the Surrounding World, edited by Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee, pages 254-78.

[2] His name in Arabic-based and most English texts is Suhrawardi.

[3] In New Persian literature it is called Simorgh and in Pahlavi or Middle-Persian, *Sen-Murv*. Simorgh is a legendary bird in Persian fairy tales, both in the oral literature and in texts such as *Shahnameh*. It has extraordinary powers and appears in many different manifestations; besides divine wisdom, it may symbolize the perfected human being. In Persian tales, Simorgh saves (future) heroes such as infant Zal, who was abandoned by his father Saam. In an oral tale, collected by Homa A. Ghahremani, Simorgh helps prince Khorshid, who was thrown in a well by his brothers Kiumars and Jamshid. He takes him up seven floors and gives him three feathers from his wing. Prince Khorshid is supposed to burn a feather when he needs Simorgh's magical power (This tale is in The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies' website: http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Mythology/simorgh_story.htm June 18, 2006) As Ghahremani affirms, according to some Pahlavi texts, Simorgh is a bird whose abode is in the middle of a sea in a celestial tree (called Tuba) "which contains all the seeds of the vegetable world. Whenever Simorgh flies up from the tree one thousand branches grow, and whenever she sits on it, one thousand branches break and the seeds fall into the water. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Simorgh's abode is on top of the mountain Qaf, which probably refers to the Alborz mountain. She lives nearby in a jungle. Every year she lays three eggs and each year her chicks are eaten by a serpent. If you could kill the serpent, she surely would take you home" (in Ghahremani's tale). In a number of tales, Simorgh is so luminous that it could injure any eye which looks at it or even its reflection in a mirror.

[4] The metaphorical language of the philosophy of illuminationism is known as the cause of the controversy in terms of the interpretation(s) of this school of thought. Sohrevardi was conscious about this issue. Ziai brings this to attention by quoting from *The Paths and Havens* where it says:

> The great and noble mystery covered by the symbolic [and metaphorical] expression of our book the *Philosophy of Illumination*, we can only address to our companions the illuminationists (*ashabuna al-ishraqiyyun*). (in Ziai 29)

[5] Hoopoe in Persian poetics is the symbol of wisdom and famous for its sharp-sightedness. In Attar's *Conference of Birds* the hoopoe takes the lead in the birds' journey to find Simorgh that symbolizes the truth.

[6] For a brief examination of the impact of illuminationism on Islam and the Islamic revolution refer to Michael Fischer's *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledge: Persian Poesis in the Transnational Circuitry* (131-147). Also see *Illumination in Islamic Mysticism* that explores the influence of this philosophy on Sufism.

Filmography

Avini, Sayyed Morteza. *Ravāyat'i Fath* (*The Narration of Victory*).1980-1993. TV documentary series, IRIB.

Bani-Etemad, Rakhshan. *Bānū'i Urdībihisht* (*The May Lady*). 1998.

---. *Nargiss*. 2000.

Bayzai, Bahram. *Amū Sibīlū* (*Uncle Moustache*). 1970.

---. *Safar* (*Travel*). 1971.

---. *Ragbār* (*Thunder Shower*). 1971.

---. *Gharibih va Mih* (*The Stranger and the Fog*). 1974.

---. *Kalāgh* (*The Crow*). 1977.

---. *Chirīkih'i Tārā* (*The Ballad of Tara*). 1978.

---. *Marg'i Yazd-gird* (*The Death of Yazd-gird*). 1983.

---. *Bāshū: Gharibih Kuchak* (*Bashu: The Little Stranger*). 1986.

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